

How to Achieve Peace



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“One Voluntaryist’s Perspective” is an original column appearing most Mondays at Everything-Voluntary.com, by the founder and editor Skyler J. Collins. Archived columns can be found [here](#). OVP-only RSS feed available [here](#).

People disagree on the nature of humanity. Some believe that we are violent, and others believe that we are peaceful. I think that both beliefs are correct. Here’s why, and here’s how to achieve peace.

Needs

As living organisms, we have many needs. We need oxygen to breathe, water to hydrate, food to energize, shelter for warmth, and society to stay sane. These are our basic needs from which we sustain our lives. Without them, we die.

Violence

The use of violence, of destroying something, is a necessary tool in meeting at least one of our needs. We kill plants and animals for food. But it’s also necessary when we are being forcefully prevented from meeting other needs. When we are trapped in a sealed area, for example, and as the available oxygen depletes, we become violent toward whatever has us trapped. If someone or something is keeping much needed water from us, we’ll become destructive in order to obtain it. I think it’s accurate to say that a display of violence is a symptom of an unmet need.

Cure

If violence is a symptom of an unmet need, then what is the cure to violence? The simplistic answer is obvious, meet the need. But the roots of violence are rarely so simplistic. Meeting needs can be difficult, especially if our more complex needs have been unmet or mostly unmet since birth. We’re more likely to misjudge the forces in our lives that are interfering with the meeting of our needs. We then become violent towards the wrong cause.

Trade

In order to reduce violence, we must increase everyone's ability to meet their needs. If we are unable to meet our needs ourselves, then we must cooperate with others. Cooperation is, in essence, trade. When people trade, they do so because they expect to gain. Mutual benefit, in other words, and so it is with cooperation. What is traded is not only material, but also ideas and sentiments. As people benefit, they are better able to meet their needs. In other words, trade increases knowledge and wealth, knowledge and wealth increases the capacity to meet needs, and more met needs means a decrease in violence.

Peace

To achieve peace, then, we must increase trade. If an area of the world is plagued with violence, then the cure is not more violence, but in removing the restrictions to trade. When people are able to freely trade with one another, they can better meet their needs and put away the use of violence. And what is the essence of trade? Voluntaryism.

Final Thoughts

It's disappointing to look out at the violence in the world and think, if only generals, politicians, and bureaucrats would get out of the way of everyone else, we would have more peace, and thus greater prosperity. It can make one almost cynical toward the idea that these criminals would rather the world not have peace. Of course, that would mean that their own needs have gone unmet somewhere in the course of their lives.

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