APPENDIX

NIETZSCHE AND FREUD ON VIOLENCE

Violence in all its shades and nuances has always been a distressing issue in any civil society. We have already considered how any kind of violence emanates and erupts from the mind. We have tried to address the issue by discussing the psychological make-up of the terrorists. In the main text however we have not considered the views of two most significant philosophers, Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud, who have written extensively on this matter. In the appendix, therefore I wish to make a brief survey of both these views, noting their similarities as well as their points of difference.

There are quite a few explanations of ‘violence’ per se in the realm of psychology. Let us first turn to the view of Nietzsche on this issue. In the book ‘Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future’ the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche mentions that as a race, we have never lost our instinct for cruelty— we have only refined it. We are unique among animals in being both creatures and creators, and the strongest among us turn our instinct for cruelty against ourselves. The creator within us reshapes the creature that we are by violently attacking its weaknesses. Suffering, then is essential to growing stronger, and we must struggle constantly to remake ourselves by embracing our weaknesses and prejudices.

While in Nietzsche’s account of the Will to Power, the Essence of life, applies to everything in existence, the concept is easiest to grasp if we think of it in terms of an inner struggle. We all live according to certain assumptions or fundamental beliefs, some more obvious than others. One person may hold

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1 1886, Cambridge University Press.

2 Will to Power: Nietzsche’s will to power does not suggest raw physical or political power. This is a “cosmic” innerforce acting in and through both animate and inanimate objects. Not just instinct but also high level behaviour which includes both harmful physical acts such as violence, lying, domination and non-harmful acts like loving, gift-giving, praising etc. This will can be understood (or misunderstood) to mean a struggle against one’s surroundings that culminates in personal growth, self overcoming and self-perfection and assert that the power held over others as a result of this is coincidental. (Nietzsche, The will to Power, p. 636).
fundamentalist religious views, while another may cling to the assumption that democracy is the best political system. For Nietzsche the question of whether these assumptions and beliefs are true or false, just or unjust, is not an issue. What matters is that all beliefs and assumptions represent our identity—they are the bedrock from which we build ourselves. The greatest power that we can have is power over ourselves in the same way we gain power over External Enemies: by attacking and submitting them to our will. Strong willed people, whom Nietzsche often refers to as free-spirits, are always ready to attack their fundamental beliefs and assumptions, to question their very identity. There is a great safety in resting assured that certain truths or beliefs are beyond question, and it takes great courage to question our fundamental “truths”. Nietzsche holds that what is important is not the courage of our convictions, but the courage for an attack on our convictions. Such courage exhibits a strong will to power, the will to choose self-mastery over safety.

With Nietzsche’s denigration of Christianity and democracy, and his ardent praise of strife and violence, it is important to note that he is not the warmongering brute that the Nazi party, among others proclaimed him to be. Although he believes that violence and bloodshed are required for the settlement of an anarchic society; (reminds us of Karl Marx). Such violence, however, was only for the betterment of the society. Nietzsche does not promote physical violence, as he admires the vigour of those who are capable of it. He thinks it hypocritical that people who lack the vigour to be violent condemn violence.

At this backdrop, we should also bring in the issue of Nietzsche being a ‘Nihilist’.Karen Carr describes Nietzsche’s characterization of nihilism “as a condition of tension, as a disproportion between what we want to value (or need) and know the world appears to operate.” When we find that the world does not possess the objective value or meaning that we believed it to have, we find ourselves in crisis. With all violence and tensions that the world witnesses, Nietzsche asserts that nihilism is in fact the characteristic of modern age:

Nihilism is the philosophical doctrine suggesting the negation of one or more putatively meaningful aspects of life; further arguing that life has no objective meaning purpose or intrinsic value. Moral Nihilists hold that morality does not inherently exist. Thus to them killing is neither right nor wrong. To them all moral claims are false.
especially with the decline of Christianity and the rise of physiological decadence. After observing such humongous turbulences in this world Nietzsche observes:

"God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. Yet his shadow still looms. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is it the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become Gods simply to appear worthy of it?"

But Nietzsche is optimistic enough to think that it is only amidst us that there is an Overman (the concept of 'Overman' or 'Superman'; was thus first introduced by him) who is far ahead of us and considers humans as mere living creatures and this is the one who would direct us in the correct path; thereafter peace would sustain on Earth; marking the end of all violence and destruction.

In order to attain Overman, humanity must be passed through. In other words, human nature is not of itself an end and a goal but a means to some higher and yet to be determined end.

In this way the collective suffering that defines human existence is open to being redeemed. The fragments of our existence need to be forged into a new unity: all that is 'fragment and riddle and dreadful accident' in humankind needs to be reassembled into something that enables humanity to realize its future potential.

In his book 'Toward the Genealogy of Morals'— we find Nietzsche idealising violence as a means of achieving morality. He also talks of other human ideals leading to morality; but what is essentially required is power and violence. Nietzsche speaks of two kinds of morality—morality of the master and morality

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Masterslave morality is the central theme of Nietzsche's works, found particularly in the first-Essay On the Genealogy of Morality. Nietzsche argues that, there are two kinds of morality, noble morality and slave morality where the former values pride, strength and nobility and the latter values kindness, humanity and sympathy. Noble morality weights actions on a scale of good or evil consequences, whereas slave morality weighs actions on a scale good or bad intentions. Unlike master morality which is sentiment, slave morality is re-sentiment—revaluating that which the master values. As master morality originates in the strong, slave morality originates in the weak, as the latter is the reaction to oppression. The slave morality does not seek to transcend the masters but to make them slaves as well.

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of the slave. In both these moralities, a desire to gain 'power' is found. Power has been directly accepted in case of noble morality (i.e., morality of the master) but the slave morality is not inherent in the idea of power. It must be noted that the 'power' found in the morality of the master is constructive, i.e. mass saving and not mass killing, though the master can apply violence in self-defence or when essentially required. In other cases, the master can never harm others—as Nietzsche confirms that, these can not be the components of noble morality.

Nietzsche believes that, it is better to express anger and violence than to keep it bottled up inside. For by expressing it, one discharges all the destructive energy. Thus he prefigures much cod psychobabble about the need we have to express ourselves and inner natures. But in contrast to much psychotherapy (of Freud), there is little safer or suburban about Nietzschean therapy, he is not proposing a gentle “talking cure”. He continues that “In order to discharge one’s ressentiment one must become like a marauding Viking or Homeric hero, an artist of expressive violence.7

Nietzsche further contends: “It is vain rhapsodizing and sentimentality to continue to expect much from mankind, once it has learned not to wage war. For the time being we know of no other means to imbue exhausted peoples, as strongly and surely as every great war does. Culture absolutely can not do without passions, vices and acts of malice.”8

As we aim to make a comparative study on violence, proposed by Nietzsche and Freud, we would like to note here that Freud would never encourage aggression, war or violence to this extent. According to Freud, violence and aggression come from repression of libidinal urges or sexual instincts. Thus a boy of five year develops an Oedipus Complex. He becomes violent and aggressive for not getting his mother as intimately as his father does. Hence totally rejects his father. This is how aggression and violence develop in an individual since childhood. But Freud adds to this, that the presence of super ego in an individual helps to curb the anger or violence thus formed in a being.

Sigmund Freud, further points out that the civilization is only made possible by individual renouncements, including renouncement of violence. Violent individuals, however, do not experience any guilt about a violent act, nor
do they have an empathic connection with their victim. In his book ‘Civilization and Its Discontents’ Freud contends that psychoanalysis shows that human nature is composed of primitive impulses, including selfish and cruel impulses. The primitive impulses undergo a lengthy process of modification during one’s development. They are inhibited, redirected to different aims, or commingled with one another. Civilization is attained through renouncing or controlling these impulses. Human life in a community is possible as a result of people coming together and agreeing that no one individual can exert power over another, and where individuals agree to restrict their own personal inner wishes in favour of the communal needs. In other words Freud states that, people have to develop the two tenets of human nature and society: guilt and empathy for fellow humans.

In his book ‘Civilization and Its Discontents’ Freud further notes that, the “greatest threat to civilization” is the constitutional inclination of human beings to be aggressive towards one another.” (Freuds 108). Furthermore he adds (using his psychodynamic constructs) that, most of us traditionally internalize our sense of aggression against ourselves by using our super ego to hold the ego in check. While we all struggle with many forms of aggression, including anger at ourselves and amongst ourselves, few of us are ever likely to become violent. However, we all learn hatred even if we never externalize it outwardly.

The most violent individuals do not seem to have a super ego, but the strength of the super ego (with all its potent force like that of a demi-God, in its metaphorical power), gets expressed externally onto others —individuals, groups, institutions or even countries —encompassing acts of murder on a variety of fronts.

Freud further holds that at present a kind of psychological disorder is found, which he terms as Terrorist Syndrome Psychosis or Terrorist Syndrome Neurosis. This comes with an inventory of attendant symptoms to include but not be limited to the following.

• A sense of superiority that includes excessive hatred of another group;
• A sense of paranoia that seems to indicate that they “must get others before others get them first”;

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• A delusion system or pattern of thoughts and thinking related to killing of others, often genocidal in nature;

• A personal sense of meaninglessness with a seeming absence of personal identity except to identify one’s self as martyr for a cause in what would appear to be a borderline personality set of symptoms; and

• A sense of rage that seems pre-oedipal and oedipal (totemically) in nature among others.⁹

In his book Introduction to Psychoanalysis (1917), Freud mentions his Psychodynamic Theory on violence. He contends that violence is an exertion of physical force to injure or destroy; always accompanied by emotion of anger or hostility which may or may not be consciously perceived. Anger must reach certain intensity before resulting in violence. The threshold of violence varies from individual to individual based upon biological differences. In ‘Psychodynamic Theory’ Freud points out that, violence are drives. ‘Drives’ (triebs) refer to a state of readiness for certain type of behaviour. Violence and sex are considered by Freud as Primary Drives. The primary drive — ‘violence’ is based on ‘Thanatos’ the death instinct, and the other primary drive is responsible for discharging energy.

For Freud, aggression was thus a basic human impulse that is repressed in well-adjusted people, who have experienced a normal childhood. However, he believes that, if the aggressive impulse is not controlled, or is repressed to an unusual degree, some aggression can “leak out” of the unconscious and a person can engage in random acts of violence. Freud terms this as “displaced aggression.”¹⁰ In other words, violence is the displacement of thanatos from self onto others.

In Freud’s letter to Albert Einstein (Vienna, Sept. 1932) during World War II, Einstein brought in the notions of law and power, and also suggested that a healthy relation between the two can solve the problem of war and violence. In this context Freud writes to Einstein:—

⁹ As found in an article called ‘The Mythos of Terrorism— through the prism of Sigmund Freud’s Civilization and Its Discontents’— by Charlotte Ann Frick, CUNY Graduate School.

"You begin with the relationship between law and power. That is certainly the correct starting point for our inquiry. Might I substitute the word ‘power’ with the harsher, harder word ‘violence’? Today, we see law and violence as opposites. So conflicts of interest between human beings are in principle resolved by the use of violence.”

Freud further writes that, ‘muscle-power today decides to whom something should belong. With the introduction of weapons, intellectual superiority is already beginning to assume the place of raw muscle-power; the final purpose of the struggle remains the same, one side is to be obliged, by the damage inflicted upon it and by the paralysis of its forces, to abandon its claim or its resistance. This is accomplished most thoroughly when the adversary is permanently removed by the use of violence, which is to say: killed. The intention to kill can be resisted by the consideration that the enemy might be employed to perform useful services if kept alive and in fear. This is the beginning of the practice of sparing the enemy, but from now on the victor must reckon with a lurking desire for revenge on the part of the loser, and relinquishes a part of his own security. That, then is the original state, the dominance of greater might, of raw or intellectually supported force. We know that this regime changed over the course of its development, and a path led from force to law. According to Freud there is only one path and that is unity or unified forces which would represent the law in contrast to the force of the individualist.

Freud thinks that the overcoming of violence is possible by transfer of power to a greater entity, held together by the emotional bonds of its members. All else is merely enactment and repetition.

Thus Freud contends that a society, nation, hence world can be saved by different people uniting together.

Freud finally concludes his letter with the view about how peace can be brought in the society. He concludes thus:
"How long must we wait before the others become pacifists as well? 'We cannot say, but perhaps it is not a utopian hope that the influence of these two factors, the cultural attitude and the justified fear of the effects of a future war, will put an end to warfare within the foreseeable future, along which paths or deviations we cannot guess. Meanwhile we say to ourselves: Everything that promotes the development of civilization also works against war.'"

In the book "Freud 2000" in an article called 'Freud On Violence'; C. Fred Alford notices that Freud understands the appeal of violence, the way it satisfies a need as much as sex does. It is a scary thought, that humans want and need 'violence' much as they want and need 'love'. The origin of violence is what Freud calls Todestrieb—the death instinct which has often been used by him as a synonym of 'Thanatos' although the word 'Thanatos' is not coined by Freud. Freud uses the word 'Todestrieb' in contrast with Eros—the two great principles of civilization. Thanatos is not mere destruction, it includes self-destruction. In Greek mythology Thanatos is the twin brother of Hypnos-sleep;—silence, sleep, night and death comprise the external peace of non-being—the total cessation of stimulation — these two are dimensions of Thanatos, dimensions that come frighteningly close to Eros.

In his early writings, Freud sees aggression as an expression of sadism, bound to sexuality. Later Freud understands that impulses of cruelty arise from sources which are, in fact, independent of sexuality, but may become united with it at an early stage (Civilization and Its Discontents). If aggression is independent, it stems from the self-preservation drives (Eros). However, in the 1915 edition of 'Three Essay' Freud modified his claim, arguing that 'the impulse of cruelty arises from the instinct for mastery', omitting the phrase 'being independent of sexuality'. It was not until 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' that Freud explicitly posits an independent, aggressive drive, derived from the Todestrieb against which Freud sets Eros, which assimilates all that strives towards life including the self-preservation instincts.
In ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ thanatos is turned on itself. Freud’s inspiration, however, is not the vast destruction of the First World War, but a little boy’s compulsion to repeat a simple game, namely throwing a spool out of his bed and pulling it back again. Freud wonders why we love to repeat the unpleasant experiences. He recognises that the compulsion to repeat is itself an expression of a drive to restore the earliest state of things and that state of all is ‘non-being’. Seen in this light, the theoretical importance of the instincts of self-preservation, of self-assertion and of mastery greatly diminishes. They are component instincts whose function is to assure that the organism shall follow its own path to death, to ward off any possible way of returning to inorganic existence other than those which are immanent in the organism itself.14

From this perspective we fight and kill each other not because violence is satisfying, but in order to be left alone to die in our own time.

The theory of violence changes in Freud’s book ‘Civilization and Its Discontents’. Here the evidence of the Todestrieb is historical, not psychological, ranging from the atrocities committed by the Huns to the ‘horror of the recent World War’. Aggression, here sounds much like sexual satisfaction says Freud.15 Several times he compare the use of others for sexual purposes with their use as objects of aggression. Freud further holds that if aggression runs rampant over the world, which is the theme of ‘Civilization and Its Discontents’, then the only solution is to turn aggression inward and not outward. Freud continues that civilization is the aggression turned back against the self (that is, conscience), the alternative to the war of all against all. Super ego or super state: these are the choices we live with. Any other choice is to die.

Let us now try to make a close study of the points of similarity and dissimilarity between the two thinkers. The theorist who appears to come closest to Freud on violence is actually Friedrich Nietzsche, particularly his appreciation of the duality of violence — that sometimes civilization seems to be a choice between suicide on homicide. Despite Freud’s claim that he turned to Nietzsche only late in life, there is evidence that Freud knew more Nietzsche earlier than he latter on. But as we proceed we find that perhaps they also diverge at many instances, and diverge sharply on those.
Nietzsche has worshipped cruelty as the pridominal pleasure of the truly strong. But Freud in ‘Civilization and Its Discontents’, rather says that cruelty—even though is a basic primitive drive in humans; has to be curbed or channelized in a different direction so as to be accepted by the society.

Nietzsche thus talks of externalization of violence, as he believes that the pent up aggression if externalized to the society from our system, it is only then the humans can lead a peaceful and healthy life. But it has to be remembered that in his book ‘Beyond Good and Evil’ while discussing violence, Nietzsche mentions that physical violence never does any good to the society. What Nietzsche admires most is the person who is capable of physical violence but sublimates his will to destroy others, directing it instead at himself or herself. Do we surprisingly find an echo of Freud’s saying in this so-called war-monger?

Throughout Nietzsche’s philosophy, violence seems to get celebrated. In his book Human, All Too Human (p. 477); Nietzsche further mentions that a culture and civilization cannot forcefully move on without the victory of war. But Freud was quite sceptical of this notion. He knew that if the violence that is there in the humans is given space to manifest externally then human species would get devastated. Thus in Freud’s philosophy violence is neither celebrated nor manifested every now and then to evacuate our systems as Nietzsche believed.

On reading Nietzsche closely we do find an underlying similarity between him and Freud, as far as their theory on violence is concerned.

When Nietzsche talks of force or power, it is not always raw, physical force as has been reflected in the following passage from Nietzsche’s Notebooks.

“I have found strength where one does not look for it: in simple, mild and pleasant people, without least desire to rule— and conversely, the desire to rule has often appeared to me a sign of inward weakness: they fear their own slave soul and shroud it in a royal clock.”

And this royal cloak used as disguise is none other than violence. It has been found that Nietzsche himself was a physically ill person (lacking the vigour of the heroes, which he worshipped); and served as a medical orderly in the
Franco-Prussian war. Hence psychologically he admired great warriors with vigour, their grandiosity and full of life force — which lacked in him. When Nietzsche speaks admiringly of images of war where people are willing to risk their lives for their ideas, he does not envision nuclear or contemporary biological warfare.

Nietzsche loves the good fight (Just War), the agon, but the primary struggle in Nietzsche’s mind was his own struggle within himself, with his poor health condition, with his Christian Bourgeois upbringing with his own feelings of meekness, pity and resentment. He perhaps idolized violence since he was physically weak, hence violence or aggression for him was a way out from the sufferings he faced due to his short comings. Thus he was indeed a trooper if not a warrior. All the rest, we can charitably but cheerfully say, was mere metaphors. 18

Thus Nietzsche cherishes the grandiosity, the courage, the immense life force, the justice upheld by sublimating the unjust; of a war but this does not imply that he upheld violence and terror in the society encouraging genocide. This has to be understood very carefully.

The apparent divergence between Nietzsche and Freud thus diminishes and hence perhaps Freud says: “Nietzsche, the other philosopher whose premonitions and insights agree in one most amazing manner with the laborious results of psychoanalysis, I have long avoided.”19

But the points on which both Freud and Nietzsche sharply differ; are as follows:-

First, for Freud unlike Nietzsche violence is no source of rebirth and renewal. That is the task of Eros. Freud believes the more thanatos is loosed upon the world, the more the super ego must direct its violence against the self, making both self and world a less hospitable dwelling for Eros.

Secondly, Freud’s notion of aggression or violence is a result of libidinal repression; in other words violence is a sexual by product, unlike Nietzsche who gives no such explanation for the causation of violence in the world.

Lastly, I would like to mention that the violence and its externalization that Nietzsche often talks about is of a peculiar variety; as it is pregnant with
'noble morality' where harm is brought only when essentially required (that is either in case of self-defense or to destroy evil). But unfortunately Nietzsche is misinterpreted as the war-monger creating Adolf Hitler. The violence that Nietzsche talks about is constructive and not destructive, it is mass-saving and not mass-killing (like the phenomenon of terrorism). Freud does not encourage even this variety of violence and its externalization, as for him unity is the answer to injustice and not war. (even though just).

Here perhaps lies the crucial difference between the two Germans, both giving a close account of violence from the socio psycho perspective.

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The analogy might be as follows: A surgeon understands that this is the time when the patient must undergo an operation. To the patient such a surgical intervention might appear to be violent. Similarly Nietzsche, a critic of democracy, holds that a democratic form of government (where people lack intellect to choose their representatives) requires a change in the system for which violence is essential (to change such a corrupt and oppressive government) — but to the rest, the means of such change might appear to be violent and also terrorist in nature.
References


8. Human, All Too Human, P. 477.


10. As found in Freud’s letter to Einstein ‘Why War?’.


17. Friedrich Nietzsche; Nicholas, Fall 1880 6[206].
