

BUILDING A NEW GLOBAL ARCHITECTURE OF PEACE

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Abstract

The sharp and widespread increase in conflict and the world's growing geopolitical instability confirm Pope Francis' thesis of a "third world war in pieces". Starting from this premise, my paper addresses the theme of the desired "building of a new global architecture of peace", beginning by outlining the characteristics of the human soul, the nature of conflict and the probable reasons behind it, identified mainly in man's irrationality and his aversion to the "other than himself". It then dwells on war and the "culture of negotiation" as its valid alternative, a stimulus to dialogue and an unpredictable factor of new hope for peace. A hope that, regardless of any desirable measure or initiative, springs from a real understanding and respect for differences and a newfound trust in mankind and the natural aspirations of peoples.

Keywords: conflict, human soul, irrationality, culture of negotiation, hope.

Pope Francis was right: we are experiencing a "third world war in pieces"¹.

After more than seventy years of relative peace, conflicts in the world are again on the rise; and to these has been added the invisible and pervasive threat of terrorism. In 2024, the most authoritative research institutes recorded as many as 56 active conflicts (the highest number since the Second World War), which continue to involve, more or less directly, around 92 countries and which produced at least 233,000 victims and almost 100 mil-

¹ Pope Francis first referred to a "third world war in pieces" on 13 September 2014 during his visit to the Redipuglia military cemetery, which commemorates over 100,000 soldiers who died in World War I. Since then, he had often reiterated this concept, noting that the so many ongoing international conflicts are interconnected and affect the entire world.

lion internally displaced persons and refugees last year alone². The growing number of conflicts and countries involved in clashes is alarming. The proliferation of armed groups, the use of new technologies (since 2018, the use of drones has increased by 1,400%), the rise in military spending, the increasingly widespread crisis of governance and, more generally, growing geopolitical instability are also, and above all, increasing violence against civilians and the weakest fringes of populations (the elderly, women and children).

Nowadays, even those of us who have the good fortune to live in countries or areas of the world that have been at peace for decades see the news bursting into our homes with constant images of aggression, clashes, attacks, murders and other large or small daily acts of violence: criminal episodes that are often striking not only for their heinousness, but also for their absolute gratuitousness. One wonders then whether it is true - as Erich Fromm wrote in 1973³ - that “the characteristic of man is that he can be driven by the impulse to kill and to torture, feeling voluptuousness” and that he is “the only animal that can kill and destroy members of his own species without any rational advantage, neither biological nor economic”.

On closer inspection, it would appear so. No animal freely kills other animals of the same species. It does so either to defend itself, its family or its territory (so-called “defensive aggressiveness”) or to conquer a scarce resource by taking it from its fellow animal (so-called “predatory aggressiveness”). If the resource is then, as almost always happens, an animal of a different species on which the other feeds (examples of cannibalism involving one’s own kind are very rare among animals), then we see episodes of hunting, fighting or running away, but never gratuitous killing. “In the vast majority of cases”, wrote the founder of modern war studies Gaston Bouthoul in 1951⁴, “animals do not make war on each other. Their predatory activity in general is directed against animals of other species and on which they feed.” And in hunting - we may add - the prey almost never opts for combat, but for escape.

If we go back to consider human beings, we have to admit instead that the history we continue to learn in school is precisely made up of wars, rev-

² For a brief assessment, useful reference may be made, among others, to the website www.guerrenelmondo.it.

³ E. FROMM, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1973.

⁴ G. BOUTHOU, *Les guerres: éléments de polémologie*, Payot, Paris, 1951.

olutions, betrayals and murders; centuries of evolution and progress, moral or religious precepts, past tragedies or the interdependencies of today's globalisation have not yet succeeded in eradicating the human tendency to fight and overpower in order to attain one's needs or to assert one's will.

But then is man violent by nature? On this question, too, countless studies and theories have alternated over the centuries. In particular, two different schools of thought have emerged: one influenced by the teachings of Hobbes, according to whom men are nothing more than animals and as such violent by nature (*"homo homini lupus"*); the other inspired by the ideas of Rousseau who, on the contrary, considered men to be peaceful and good-natured by nature, but then possibly made aggressive and violent by external circumstances. The most widespread thesis today is the result of a compromise and is based on the observation that not all violence is the same. That is, there are fundamentally two different types of aggressiveness: a rational one, called "proactive", which is exercised "cold" and is always premeditated (and is very widespread among mankind); the other instinctive, called "reactive", which explodes suddenly "hot" as a reaction to anxiety, anger or fear and is never premeditated (and is less widespread than the first). In other words, this is what Richard Wrangham, Professor of Biological Anthropology at Harvard, in 2018, called the "paradox of goodness" (humans can be the most perfidious and vile species but also the kindest and most caring)⁵ and which is explained precisely by considering that planned aggression and social tolerance are not opposing behaviours, but complementary, since they derive from the two different forms of aggressiveness.

Having said this, the reflection goes first of all to conflict: to this dimension of being innate in the reality of things, congenital to our species and, for this very reason, an inescapable category of human action and history, recognized over the centuries by those unwritten norms legitimising (but, not by chance, only at the international level and never in domestic public order) recourse to the use of force and warlike violence.

In spite of a wide variety of interpretative models, most observers and scholars agree with the thesis expounded in 1956 by the American

⁵ R. WRANGHAM, *The Goodness Paradox: The Strange Relationship Between Virtue and Violence in Human Evolution*, Pantheon Books, New York 2018.

sociologist Lewis Coser⁶, according to whom every type of conflict can be reduced, in essence, either to a struggle over values or to a claim of rights over scarce resources (conflicts defined by some as “qualitative” and “quantitative”). Conflicts of the first type derive from ethnic, racial, national, religious, political or ideological confrontations and would rarely be resolvable, since any ideology (even the most tolerant and democratic) is by definition all-encompassing, and tends to replace, by erasing it, any different or alternative ideology. Those of the second type originate, instead, from efforts to acquire material or immaterial (such as a power or status or a specific professional position) resources, rendered “economic goods” by their real scarcity or predetermined by an organizational order, and lend themselves more easily to attempts at solution inspired by the possible balancing of the different interests at stake.

In this regard, it should be noted how equally widespread is the belief that there is never just one objective cause of conflict, even if it appears to be so or even if only one is the trigger. Thus, even those conflicts apparently attributable to only one of the two types always derive from a mixture of the struggle over values and the claim of scarce resources. Just as the latter could, in turn, consist of disputes over a good or the realisation of a purpose that are identical for both parties or over the acquisition of goods or the realisation of different and incompatible goals.

It also appears confirmed in theory and by concrete observation that, just as conflict most often arises from a mixture of factors that are difficult to separate and define individually, so too the parties involved in it do not always have a clear perception of the object of the dispute, since each instinctively refers it to its own system of values and its own yardstick. It is no coincidence that some scholars⁷ have already critically re-examined and ended up denying the recent thesis according to which, in every conflict, there are always possible “objective principles” capable of facilitating the reaching of an agreement. Such principles - it is argued - even if they can be invoked, are in any case of no help in resolving the conflict, since at the basis of every human decision there is always a subjective motivation, deriving from a wholly personal perception of the cost-benefit ratio of the agreement.

⁶ L.A. COSER, *The Function of Social Conflict*, The Free Press, Glencoe 1956.

⁷ Among others, G. POLIZZI, *Guerra e Pace: un'alternativa chiamata “cultura del negoziato”*, in Rev. Nuova Voce del Rotary, n.11, Rome, April 2018; as well as in AA.VV., *Conflitti*, Edicusano, Rome 2020 (Proceedings of the Conference of the same title, organized by the Italian Geographic Society and the “Niccolò Cusano” University, Rome, 2018).

This observation is even more evident in the case of conflicts over values. Values are in fact such only for those who share them (to the point that the common notions of “right” or “wrong” are in these cases devoid of any meaning) and determine the emergence of conflicts whenever their bearers attempt to unduly project them onto others, denying the latter’s different values. Transposed, then, at the level of the organised community (ethnic group, political party, national minority, etc.), they often become not only the unifying factor, but also the legitimising reason for that community, so that any attack on values is automatically perceived by those who share those values as an attack on the very existence of the community.

Whatever its type or dimension, historical experience and the observation of daily news confirm the common understanding of conflict only as a negative event, in the face of which there is no alternative to one of the three well-known options theorised as early as 1945 by the neuropsychologist Karen Horney in her “triangle of primary impulses”: flight, submission or fight⁸. That is, depending on one’s own strength or advantage, the conflict can only be avoided or suffered or faced. And beyond the first hypothesis, which is obviously unsuitable for settling the dispute, there is no other possibility but more or less conditional surrender or confrontation, with the latter always being long, costly, and devastating.

And so, our thoughts turn to the reasons for violence and war, even though we know that rivers of ink have always been spilled on conflicts and wars, their causes, developments and outcomes, as well as on the search for means to prevent or resolve them, without such analyses having contributed in the slightest to reducing their incidence in international or domestic reality. And above all, so far, without the future prospects of humanity appearing any less problematic and gloomy.

On the other hand, although war is also in a sense an instrument of conflict resolution, it is certainly not a good thing, since it always comes at an enormous cost of destruction, suffering and death (the old theory of the “just” war is now more than outdated, based on the fact that any war is almost always considered “just” by both belligerents). So, war is evil, most scholars and our common thinking conclude. And it exists because evil inevitably exists in life. “Reason absolutely condemns war”, wrote Kant in

⁸ K. HORNEY, *Our Inner Conflicts: A Constructive Theory of Neurosis*, Norton, New York 1945.

1795⁹. However, also the most recent contributions from cognitive neuroscience have confirmed that human rationality is often far less linear and coherent than we think. Add to this the fact that as early as 1954, Maslow's established theory of the "pyramid of the five basic human needs" revealed how the first three (survival, security, belonging to a group) are linked to instinct, the other two (recognition and self-fulfilment) to emotionality, but none to rationality¹⁰.

Let us go back for a moment and look at everyday life. Why do we come into conflict with our neighbour? Individual characters with varying mixes of positive and negative aspects, diversity of values, ideas and convictions, contrasting interests and goals perceived as irreconcilable, differences in instinctive moods, habits, tastes, and tendencies: all of these characterise our daily relationships with our fellow human beings. And each of these elements can generate opportunities for sharing and friendship or grounds for isolation and enmity. In other words, it is the type of relationship that exists or is to be established with the other that determines the possibility of useful collaboration or the risk of an exhausting conflict. Every human being is an extremely complex creature, with their own distinct individuality. We know what we are, what we think, desire or fear. We know our way of existing and living, and we trust in our acquired certainties. But, as for others, we really know none of this. The Czech poet and Nobel laureate Jaroslav Seifert wrote in the early 1980s: "Are you humanity? Me? No! Me neither. And everyone I have asked has told me that they are not humanity, but those others!"

Indeed, who or what, in our daily lives, most undermines our identity, making us more insecure and instinctively reactive and aggressive, if not the person or the thing which is "different" from us and our "self"? Is it perhaps this diversity, or rather this "otherness", which we do not know how to (or do not want to) perceive as a possible source of personal growth, that is the real prime cause of all conflict? The other, then, the great intellectual enigma and emotional challenge represented by those who are not like us! The other whom we would like to be the same as us, in order to be able to accept them without jeopardising our nature. The other who is instead, by definition, different from us and creates alarm and fear, since their diversity is seen as a potential threat to our deepest individuality.

⁹ I. KANT, *Zum ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf.*, Nicolovius, Königsberg (Kaliningrad) 1795.

¹⁰ A.H. MASLOW, *Motivation and Personality*, Harper & Row, New York 1954.

Hence the risk of asserting one's own identity only "against" the other. And hence the conflict which starts precisely from the very existence of the other and - I would add with the great Italian philosopher Norberto Bobbio - from the "only enemy that is our irrationality"¹¹. Long gone are the times and the logic of Aristotle who, in defining the human being as a "social animal", maintained that all dissimilarity is creative and that therefore "one grows more through the dissimilar than through the similar"¹².

Yet it is precisely this form of rationality that should inspire us in "building a new global architecture of peace". And, if words have their own hidden meaning, we gladly insist on the term "architecture" and much prefer it to the term "order". The world order, or rather the "new global order", which is much discussed as an indispensable factor for peace, is a concept that, at the international level, evokes the authoritative imposition of rules by one or more dominant subjects; whereas the term "architecture", while implying the necessary work of one or more "architects", seems to express much better (and in a more democratic form) the idea of a result obtained by the voluntary collaboration of different subjects and the constructive interaction of their founding elements. "Order" is closed and immutable (until it is subverted); "architecture" is open and innovative. Order descends from above; architecture moves from below. Order belongs to a world that tends to be as "unipolar" as possible; architecture belongs to a widespread and "polycentric" structure.

A new global architecture of peace should therefore know how, and be able, to cope with the changing challenges that beset our contemporary world, recognizing and positively managing the deeper causes of the conflicts and geopolitical instability that afflict it, promoting respect for diversity, and developing increasingly intense and sustainable forms of dialogue and collaboration among international actors, reinforcing and extending recourse to the so-called "diplomatic method"¹³ both in the resolution of inevitable bilateral disputes and in the joint management of major global issues, such as overcoming economic disparities and development needs,

¹¹ N. BOBBIO, *Il problema della guerra e le vie della pace*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1979-2009.

¹² ARISTOTLE, *Politics*, book VI.

¹³ More than a real method, it is a value concept and a training criterion. Inspired by the principle of "good faith", the diplomatic method is, to use a beautiful and concise definition, "that way of conducting international relations that is based on negotiation and that tends to agreement" (A. MARESCA, *Dizionario giuridico diplomatico*, Giuffrè, Milan 1991).

combating climate change, the more profitable and appropriate use of new technologies, and so on. But it would also require – it should not be forgotten – a new, and hitherto totally unknown, humanistic, cultural and spiritual approach, based on the absolute rejection of any form of coercion or violence.

“Although a product of human political processes, war has its own internal logic that makes it independent of decisions, even of those who initiated it. War has its own intimate and evil force that overwhelms and swallows up everything: it is absolute evil because it creates a spiral of hatred and violence that is difficult to escape. That is why wars must be stopped as soon as possible”. So wrote Italian political scientist and former Deputy Foreign Minister, Mario Giro¹⁴.

Just as it is now commonly accepted that true peace is not only “negative peace”, i.e. the absence of war, so there is a very valid alternative to overcome our irrationality and escape Horney’s triangle: the so-called “culture of negotiation”, to be understood, of course, not as a continuous set of exchanges or minute and wearisome bargaining, but as that particular “process of activity of two or more parties, holders of divergent but interdependent interests concerning a common issue, aimed at reaching a (satisfactory, fair and lasting) understanding on the same issue through reciprocal concessions”¹⁵.

This discipline aims to develop a particular capacity for a rational approach to the issues of conflict, war and peace and a kind of behavioural and pragmatic self-awareness in interpersonal relations. A pivotal method and tool in the pursuit of the peaceful resolution of disputes, quite different from those disciplines, such as the ethics of politics or peace studies, that suggest an ideal and abstract society from which all conflict and war are banished, the culture of negotiation instead realistically accepts the existence of conflict, knows how to identify it and analyse it in depth, strives to replace conflict perceived as “adversity and enmity” with conflict understood as “competition and competitiveness” (also in the awareness that not all conflicts are negative, as they can sometimes turn into positive factors of

¹⁴ M. GIRO, *L’Europa avvelenata-L’arte del compromesso è necessaria per fermare la guerra*, on “Domani” March 2022.

¹⁵ G. POLIZZI, *La funzione del negoziatore: profilo e problemi giuridici*, in Rev. Il Nuovo Diritto, n. 10, Abilgraf, Rome October 1995.

stimulus and development) and seeks to control, manage and overcome it in the most convenient and appropriate manner.

Considered as an arduous, but always stimulating and productive, path from conflict to consensus, the culture of negotiation reveals a rich plurality of values. First and foremost, it has an intrinsic cultural value, for the refinement of intelligence and sensitivity, for the stimulation of rationality, reflection, creativity and the unexpressed potential of the minds, for the development of interactions and synergies between individuals and peoples of different mentality, character and culture. It reveals a high social value, as a means to establish more effective interpersonal communication, to allow controlled venting of collective tensions, to create and spread tranquillity and certainty, order and collective well-being. It has its own specific economic value, deriving from the increased possibility of satisfying needs, from the more efficient reallocation of resources, from the stimulation of inventiveness and productivity, from the creation of added value and, last but not least, from the saving of the costs of conflict. It has a significant political value, as an instrument for the democratic search for consensus, for the peaceful overcoming of conflicts, for the maintenance of orderly civil coexistence, for security and stability against war and violence. Lastly, it has a very high ethical value, as a means of individual development and personal enrichment, of deepening mutual understanding, of a positive approach to interpersonal relations, of education to promote understanding, tolerance, respect and co-operation against intimidation, blackmail, brute force and oppression.

All this is the “culture of negotiation”¹⁶. Expression of freedom (that freedom that Tacitus attributed to the parties to a negotiation, the sole architects of their right)¹⁷ and sense of responsibility (of the parties to a negotiation who are truly animated by “*voluntas negotiandi*” and “*voluntas concludendi*”), the culture of negotiation is the only key for the transformation of the “sense of why” of a conflict: a why no longer addressed to the past (for what reasons? and whose responsibility?), but to the future (to what end did we sustain a conflict? and what positive effects could its resolution now have?).

“The most important thing to be said about negotiation”, again wrote Mario Giro in October 2022, “is that it represents a world of its own, a

¹⁶ For a concise but complete and structured treatment of the subject, G. POLIZZI, *Compendium of Theory, Methodology, and Technique of Negotiation*, Lulu.com, Raleigh 2021.

¹⁷ P.C. TACITUS, *Annales*, Book I.

terrain unknown even to the parties, and that it can hold many surprises. While during a war the parties are at their worst, in negotiation everything changes and the opposite can happen. Negotiation should not be mistrusted, nor should it be regarded as a surrender or a *deminutio*: rather, it is a promised land for the parties that awakens within them a desire for the future”¹⁸.

A difficult and sometimes harsh clash of intellects and characters, in a seesaw of controlled communication and patient exploration and analysis of the interests kept hidden by the other side, a constant effort at creativity in the continuous game of options and the painful exchange of concessions, negotiation ultimately reveals all its pragmatic concreteness and its value as a factor of expectation and “hope”, in preventing conflict from degenerating into violence that destroys lives and resources and in promoting better understanding, tolerance, respect, and cooperation among human beings.

It is precisely these latter values that are proving to be increasingly decisive for the building of a new global architecture of peace, which can transform into daily and sustainable reality that ideal of universal peace that, ever since the Holy Scriptures, is still revealed to believers today not as an achievement attained by man, but as a divine gift. Before being the work of man, the Church teaches us, peace is a gift of God and is the first fruit of the Resurrection, as we read in the Easter Gospel when the risen Christ announces to the disciples still immersed in fear: “Peace be with you”¹⁹.

But to be able to accept the divine gift of peace, we must nurture hope and trust, the former towards our Creator, the latter towards our fellow human beings. The first is a matter of faith; as for the second, all the same, recent studies in group psychology reveal that mistrust does not depend on ethnic-cultural differences, but is rooted in human nature.

It is often thought that the animosity and violence that break out between different groups are the result of conflicts of interest and that, once the conflicts are resolved, peace will reign. Social psychology, however, teaches otherwise. It is well known that it is sufficient to induce a group of individuals who do not know each other to split into two distinct, albeit entirely fictitious, categories for a sudden internal solidarity to emerge and a barrier of hostility and discrimination towards the opposite group to be

¹⁸ M. GIRO, *Perché è arrivato il momento di negoziare*, on “Domani” October 2022.

¹⁹ *Jn* 20:19.

created. This is explained by the fact that for thousands of years human beings have lived in small groups based on a common culture and a shared vision of the world and life, in which the predisposition to cooperate was not universal, but rather an aptitude to cooperate only with those one trusts (and this trust is linked to intimate knowledge of the person to whom it is granted). One does not trust a stranger, and therefore does not cooperate with them. The ancestral tendency to separate the world into friends and foes, to cooperate with those who are similar and to view those who are different with suspicion, is thus activated by entirely natural cognitive processes.

The birth of nation-states, the great revolutions and wars of independence, then the oligarchy of the great powers that met in Vienna in 1815, the continuation of this latter system for a century until the outbreak of the First World War, then the multilateral experience of the League of Nations with its blatant inefficiency in preventing or repressing conflicts, the disaster of the Second World War and, at its end, the birth of both the United Nations Organisation and of those regional systems (among all of which there emerged over the years the current European Union), the grey years of the Cold War and the bipolar equilibrium guaranteed by the atomic bomb, and finally, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the start of what was believed to become a “new global order”: all great historical milestones in humanity’s ever-troubled journey towards the construction of a lasting system of peace.

If we were to interrogate an AI chatbot and ask it how to build a new global architecture of peace, we would get a series of operational indications like these:

- reform existing multilateral institutions (such as the UN, WTO, regional organisations) to make them more broadly representative, transparent and effective;
- alternatively, establish a “world peace assembly”, composed of all nations on an equal footing and empowered to issue binding resolutions on global issues such as climate change, pandemics, terrorism, arms control and reduction, and respect for human rights;
- promote the commitment of all states to ensure national governance that shares international responsibilities and actions to reduce economic and social disparities, manage resources (land, water, energy, etc.) more equitably and strengthen a shared global security framework;

- adopt the most appropriate AI technologies to develop effective forms of communication and implement advanced mechanisms for the early warning of potential conflicts and the rapid initiation of peaceful dispute resolution initiatives;
- face possible threats to “cyber-security” and develop international agreements to ensure peace in “cyber-space”;
- promote worldwide exchange and intercultural dialogue initiatives and education programmes for a better understanding of diversity and mutual respect among peoples;
- integrate education for mutual understanding, tolerance, peace and negotiated conflict resolution into national education programs from an early age.

These and many other similar measures could certainly, and should, be adopted for the building of a new global architecture of peace. But the real problem is only one: none of what has been described so far can be implemented without the concordant political will of all the international players or, at the very least, of the major powers (not by chance, all nuclear) on which the great choices of humanity depend. And this concordant political will requires in everyone a very strong motivation that can overcome, if possible without suppressing it but by adapting to it, the innate and natural prevalence of national interests.

After the tragic experience of the Second World War and the “double trauma” of Auschwitz and Hiroshima with the consequent onset of the first atomic, now thermonuclear era, peace is now an inalienable value and goal, not least because a nuclear conflict would lead to such an apocalyptic scenario that the survival of the entire human race would be endangered. In the second half of the 20th century, the “negative peace”, i.e. the absence of an open direct conflict between the two blocs, was mainly maintained thanks to the so-called “balance of terror”, despite the hundreds of civil or local wars (many of them in the form of “proxy wars”) that nonetheless took place. Then, the end of the Cold War did not bring, as expected, the start of a new era of peace, but rather a much more turbulent and paradoxically more dangerous phase in international relations, in which the already fragile balances of bipolarism seem to have dissolved definitively. Borrowing the fine title of another article by Mario Giro, we too could say that “the old global order is dead, but the new one is not yet born”²⁰.

²⁰ M. GIRO, *Old global order is dead, but the new one is not yet born*, on “Domani” May 2024.

But what is needed to bring it into being? What is needed first of all is the undeniable realisation that the world we live in today is increasingly chaotic and fragmented, and that therefore, if we want to avoid the self-destruction that would be caused by a third and apocalyptic world conflict, a new global architecture of peace can only be based on an international balance that should be not “multipolar”, but simply “polycentric”. What is needed then is an intellectual and cultural change of pace on the part of world governments, aimed at recovering the ability to rationally and objectively assess global interdependencies, which are today excessively obscured by a wave of gloomy and growing warmongering. And what is needed above all is a return of peoples and individuals – in particular, of those who have even the slightest influence over leaders, society and public opinion – to a new form of spirituality based on hope and trust in humanity.

There can be no search for peace without the recovery of trust. There can be no mutual trust without sharing common values and cultural legacies. And there can be no such sharing without deep mutual knowledge and understanding. “A good diplomat”, one of my former ambassadors, to whom I was very close, once told me, “must have the firm conviction that cultural, ideological, religious and ethnic diversities are a value and ground to be cultivated and that intercultural mediation is the high road to civil coexistence and thus to peace.”

That “positive peace” - in the words of the well-known Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung - which is not only the absence of war, but above all the presence of social justice²¹.

That “true peace” – to end with Pope Francis’ words again – which “reflects and realises human nature and the natural aspirations of peoples”.

²¹ J. GALTUNG, *Peace By Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization*, Sage, New York 1996.