



A Theory of Nonviolent Action: How Civil Resistance Works

By Stellan Vinthagen

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In this ground-breaking and much-needed book, Stellan Vinthagen provides the first major systematic attempt to develop a theory of nonviolent action since Gene Sharp's seminal *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* in 1973.

Employing a rich collection of historical and contemporary social movements from various parts of the world as examples - from the civil rights movement in America to anti-Apartheid protestors in South Africa to Gandhi and his followers in India - and addressing core theoretical issues concerning nonviolent action in an innovative, penetrating way, Vinthagen argues for a repertoire of nonviolence that combines resistance and construction. Contrary to earlier research, this repertoire - consisting of dialogue facilitation, normative regulation, power breaking and utopian enactment - is shown to be both multidimensional and contradictory, creating difficult contradictions within nonviolence, while simultaneously providing its creative and transformative force.

An important contribution in the field, *A Theory of Nonviolent Action* is essential for anyone involved with nonviolent action who wants to think about what they are doing.

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Editorial Review

Review

"This superb study of nonviolent action will become the key book in the field for this generation."
(Johan Galtung, founder, *Transcend International*)

"An essential book for every researcher, activist and human rights defender interested in the sociology of resistance and the opportunities and limitations of nonviolence as a method for human emancipation."
(Mattias Gardell, *Uppsala University*)

"Combines the sociologist's rigor and the historian's overview with the activist's practical experience, resulting in a convincing synthesis—the first of its kind, and a fundamental book in its field."
(Stefan Jonsson, *Linköping University*)

"A pioneering contribution to the field. Using revealing examples of actions and campaigns, Vinthagen's sophisticated and illuminating theoretical picture is tightly linked to practice. Activists and scholars alike have much to gain from this tour de force."
(Brian Martin, *University of Wollongong*)

"Building on traditions that see nonviolence as a strategy, a tactic or a way of life, Stellan Vintagen offers a new sociological theory of nonviolent action. Scholars and activists will gain both insight and inspiration from this book."
(Roland Bleiker, *University of Queensland*)

"Vinthagen's new book is like a breath of fresh air, providing an original and diverse conceptual toolbox for activist scholars eager to revolutionize research on nonviolent action."
(Sean Taudin Chabot, *Eastern Washington University*)

"In this valuable and important contribution to the field Vinthagen advances a sociological perspective on non-violence to analyse the social practice of nonviolent actions. The unique combination of theory and practice will attract the attention of both scholars and activists."
(Annika Björkdahl, *Lund University*)

"This book is a profoundly relevant academic book. It is a rigorous, thoughtful and creative exploration of non-violent politics . . . unlike most academic work, it speaks to anyone interested in non-violent political action in contemporary society."
(Anna Leander, *Centre for the Resolution of International Conflicts, Copenhagen University*)

"The richness of the detail may make it something of a Bible of nonviolent action. . . . In this sense the book stands in Gandhi's tradition of experimentation while demonstrating how the core elements of his thought and practice open new vistas for the future of nonviolence."

(*Satyagraha Foundation for Nonviolence Studies*)

About the Author

Stellan Vinthagen is Inaugural Endowed Chair in the Study of Nonviolent Direct Action and Civil Resistance and professor of sociology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. He is also a council member of War Resisters' International, academic adviser to the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC), cofounder of the Resistance Studies Network (www.resistancestudies.org), and editor of the Journal of Resistance Studies. Since 1980, he has been an educator, organizer, and activist, and has participated in more than thirty nonviolent civil disobedience actions, for which he has served in total more than one year in prison.

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