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DOI 10.24917/20838972.16.1

The Category of Violence in Modern Philosophy

Introduction: on violence research

In this article, the author tries to present an outline of positions within the framework of modern and contemporary discourse on violence in a philosophical perspective. Following the most important violence theorists[1], the author analyses the role of violence in shaping of culture and civilisation and tries to answer the question: why do people use violence? How is it somehow inscribed in our condition?

However, it is possible to propose various ways of defining and understanding violence, and not just because there are various forms of violence, and there is a dispute among the thinkers themselves whether it is of rational (Hannah Arendt)[2] or irrational (Max Weber, Konrad Lorenz)[3] nature. Violence is often perceived as a tool for exercising power, and even as a method of settling a dispute over values. Through the centuries, the question was raised: is there a justified violence (e.g. as in the view of George W. Friedrich Hegel and Georges Sorel where it constitutes the condition and driving force of progress, or on the basis of political realism, where it is legitimised by its relationship with law) as opposed to the one which is deprived of arguments? It is also a question about threats and hopes that we associate with violence. After all, the consequences of violence towards men and the world around them are various: such as the moral effects resulting from acceptance or denying violence. Finally – many thinkers, despite the utopianism of this assumption, attempted to imagine a world without violence, what

1 I am referring to authors originating from various traditions, who explored this issue in a revealing way, even if not all of them are well-known philosophers.

2 See: Hannah Arendt, "On Violence, Civil Disobedience," in *Crises of the Republic* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: 1970), 84.

3 Konrad Lorenz, *On Aggression* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), 49.

the author means are all the trends creating intellectual foundations based on renunciation of violence, especially the idea of non-violence and civil disobedience as a response to violence in politics. The basis of the non-violence trend is Mahatma Gandhi's ethics, the creator of a spiritual trend and a political battle style, based on the renunciation of all violence. Gandhi, inspired by Hinduism, proclaimed that the world is governed by two forces: himsa and ahimsa. The first one comes down to violence and aggression, while the other means kindness towards all living beings, even readiness to sacrifice and suffer. Gandhi was convinced that violence can always be replaced with far more noble methods.[4] Gene Sharp is an example of contemporary continuator of his ideals in practical and theoretical terms.[5]

The reflection on violence, by its very nature, must combine various perspectives: history of ideas, philosophy of man and philosophy of culture, as well as Philosophy of ethics and politics. Philosophy must see the phenomenon of violence in a wide and possibly full range, and understand that it does not constitute a definite evil, and that any attempts to finally determine what violence is, without taking into account the complexity of this phenomenon, are doomed to failure.

The concept of violence is not exhausted in the issue of violence regarding the public sphere, which is spectacular, visible, supra-individual and for the analysis of which we use a large quantifier The category of violence extends however to the sphere represented by psychology as a science, which relates to "small" intimate violence of interhuman (interpersonal) relationships, expressed, for example, in the problems of sadism and masochism, phenomena analysed by Sigmund Freud and Erich Fromm.

So far, the issue of violence has been dealt with by psychologists, educators and lawyers. The complement of these investigations is a philosophical perspective. Over the last two decades, we have been moving towards interdisciplinarity in research on violence. Many thinkers were absorbed with the question: how far can we go in justifying violence which is an element of life? The very meaning of the term "violence" (in English: violence, German: der Gewalt, French: la violence, Italian:

4 See Mahatma Gandhi, *All Men are Brothers. Life and Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi as told in his own words* (Paris: UNESCO, 1958) and *Selected Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, ed. Ronald Duncan (London: Faber and Faber, 1971). The ethics of Gandhi was brilliantly described by Ija Lazari-Pawłowska in: *Etyka Gandhiego* (Warszawa: PWN, 1965).

5 See: Gene Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy. A Conceptual Framework for Liberation* (Boston: Albert Einstein Institution, 2003). This book contains a detailed overview of methods and ways to overthrow a dictatorship by non-violent means. It constituted a theoretical basis and framework of non-violence political campaigns in many countries around the world (Burma, Iran, Serbia, Ukraine).

violenza) is not as obvious as it might seem, and it covers a spectrum of phenomena. We can distinguish between physical and psychological violence, symbolic[6] and economic one, as well as real and potential violence. Violence indicates a certain asymmetrical relationship between two entities (both at the individual and group levels), one of whom is usually called a perpetrator, and the other is a victim, where by using force or power, someone's will is broken and one of the individuals is exposed to psychological or physical suffering.[7] Therefore, violence can be manifested as physical aggression, but also as unwanted domination, that is a kind of exploitation of intellectual and physical resources of the individual, its humiliation and denial of dignity, and finally – intimidation. State institutions are equipped with coercive measures necessary to ensure public peace and compliance with the law, but it is a dispute whether these coercive measures at the disposal of the state apparatus should be identified as violence itself. It can also be assumed that violence should not be appraised negatively, as it is customarily done, in the spirit of a utilitarian paradigm. It should be recognised that it is neither good nor bad, but axiologically neutral, it is subject to individual evaluation, and its assessment results from the effects it brings. In other words – there are traditions which recognise that in some situations it is the lesser of two evils. The sources of violence are the laws of physical strength, but therefore, in relation to man's destructive action, we talk about violence, rather than force, because we understand that it is more than just spontaneous and instinctive activation of nature forces, it is rooted in the human world, and it strictly belongs to it and is based on human ingenuity, it does not constitute simple channelling of instinct.

A philosophical thought, especially the one devoted to man and socially oriented, not only draws on reality and is often inspired by current events, but it also affects them and the system of values, as well as the reception of the world and means that we use to settle in it. When a philosopher undertakes the study on the problem of violence, he or she must keep this fact in mind for two reasons. First of all – to present this

6 The creator of this concept is neo-Marxist Pierre Bourdieu. It is a subtle form of violence that is not so easy to recognize and qualify as violence, because it is based on the perfidious and non-obvious exploitation of the use of its dominant social position. It exercises power over subordinate groups, which usually do not even understand that they are experiencing violence.

7 The World Health Organization proposes the following definition of violence: „Deliberate use of physical force or power, formulated as a threat or actually used, directed against yourself, another person, group or community that either leads to or with which there is a high probability of causing bodily injury, death, psychological damage, defects in development or lack of elements necessary for normal life and health." See. E. G. Krug et al., World report on violence and health, World Health Organization 2002. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12384003

concept, taking into account the historical and cultural context, by no means in isolation from the practical implications provided each time by these considerations. Here, the use of the close-reading method popular today could cause a lot of confusion and result in cognitively doubtful interpretations.

Since the history of mankind is the history of massacres and atrocities that people did to one another, historians were the first to begin to study violence, after all, human history is the history of violence. Relatively late, only in the twentieth century, after experiencing two world wars, when violence becomes universal existential experience – violence becomes the subject of interest of psychologists, cultural experts and anthropologists. In countries with strong militarist traditions and an authoritarian model of interpersonal relationships (like German Reich), the issue of violence was present in the culture reflecting the social and political life. The writings of Karol Marks, Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and even (selectively treated) Friedrich Nietzsche shaped a certain European mood of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Although in philosophy, literature and art, the subtlety has never been avoided, it was at that time that a fight became gradually a central category. The cult of strength, duel, vigour, competition and victory developed. Both in the higher and popular culture, a trend for violence aesthetisation appeared. In totalitarian states, there was a phenomenon of violence apology, hence with the fall of those ruthless systems, the climate for glorifying violence and all attempts to refine it were abandoned, while giving way to the desire to talk about war traumas in the language of literature and art (Primo Levi, Jean Amery). In philosophy, the trend of reflection on violence from the beginning mainly means the analysis of relationships between violence and power, as well as violence and human nature. Modern political philosophers (Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes and others) focus on studying the relationships between power and violence, as well as its legitimisation and types. At the same time, the question arises as to what extent violence results from human nature, as well as whether and how it is possible to control it in a man. A human tendency towards aggression will be then the subject of extensive research by psychoanalysts (like aforementioned Freud and Fromm) and anthropologists (here, e.g. Arnold Gehlen). At the same time, a thread (already present in the considerations of contractualists) of violence that is legitimate and illegitimate, occurring within the framework of the country. It is particularly developed in the issue of civil disobedience. However, the theorists of the twentieth century taking up the study of violence cannot ignore its extremely terrifying version. It is understandable that every modern thinker dealing with this topic focuses more or

less on the phenomenon of totalitarianism. It is significant that the most important contemporary researchers analysing the terror of Nazism, fascism or Bolshevism-Stalinism come from the countries, in which they triumphed (Arendt, Sofsky, Reemtsma, Agamben).

Thus, we perceive it as a constitutive component of human nature and culture itself. We explore its various forms and origins. We realise that the essence of violence is a paradox. Violence is based on a paradox because it prompts us to appoint power, which then creates new types of violence. This often causes rebellion, revolt and resistance. In other words – it is a fantasy to dream of its final elimination from the sphere of human interactions. The fear of violence pushes man into the arms of power, under the sovereign's wings. The embracing power provokes breaking free from it. When it ends again in a bloody revolution, people longing for safety and order are even ready to comply with authoritarian power. In a democracy, as Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben pointed out, they do not protect themselves against the ubiquity of the authority that controls the most intimate dimensions of life. The most crucial threads of reflection on violence in modern times focus on the relationship between power and violence. These include, among others, violence as a tool of exercising power and a guarantee of a stable state, the state as protection against violence (the tradition of Hobbes, Robert Nozick, to some extent, Immanuel Kant), power as organised violence (Karol Marks, Pierre Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, Sorel).[8] It is also possible to treat power and violence as opposing categories (Arendt), but this is a rare approach.

The problem of violence, though arousing such great emotions, does not escape from understanding, which is considered by too many people as the basis for equalling explanation with justification. It is explained as historical necessity, the foundation of social order, and even an element of human nature, recognising that although embarrassing, it is not a definite evil. It is confused with a mindless element or regularity from the sphere of politics, it routinely manifests and declares its aversion to most forms of violence, without taking up a deeper reflection on it.

Is it, however, possible to desire to prevent evil believing that it is inevitable? So why there is such a great inconsistency in the contemporary discourse on violence, when among intellectuals, there is an increase in the need to counteract violence, while stubbornly sticking by the as-

8 Michaił Bakunin writes in *Państwowość a anarchia*: „The state destroys the universal solidarity of all people and unites only part of them in order to conquer, subjugate and destroy all others." See: Bakunin, *Pisma wybrane*, T. II (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1965), 37. Although anarchists accused state institutions of using violence, they themselves were unscrupulous in using terror to abolish power structures. Most theorists of anarchism were in a position that allowed radical measures.

sumption that there is no more human attribute in the world. This is partly a scientifically grounded belief (one can refer to anthropological research on the human hormone balance, drives and aggression or on ethnological research on the historical occurrence of various forms of violence in the world), but perhaps this belief is simply an expression of superstition. Regardless of the perspective, this thought has its sources, which we can indicate. The first of them is Machiavellianism,

Machiavelli's political realism – Hegel's violence dialectics – violence as a driving force of development and a synonym of vitality in Sorel's approach – that is, on attempts to legitimise violence

Nicollo Machiavelli's thought constitutes the opposite of the concept of understanding violence as unlawful, immoral and unjust action. The Italian thinker initiated a paradigm showing the impossibility of eliminating violence from certain spheres of human activity, such as politics or law, and in extreme cases, justifying the necessity of its occurrence as a tool to achieve fundamental needs and objectives, such as safety, order or peace. The attempts to justify violence are always carried out from a perspective, within the framework of which it is showed that in certain circumstances, violence is necessary for the occurrence of higher objectives. Machiavelli argued that one cannot be moral when the epoch is immoral, thinking of violence as a synonym of effectiveness.

However, it should be known that Machiavelli postulates the rules of law, understanding that the violation of the subordinates' rights characterises despotism that he criticised. Compliance with the law is to apply to all citizens without exception. Machiavelli justifies the murder (made by Brutus and Cassius) of the tyrant, whom, in his opinion, was Julius Caesar. However, on the other hand, as Riklin accurately notes, Machiavelli's concept is based on the belief that "only a person who uses violence to destroy, not the one who uses it to build, deserves criticism"[9] Machiavelli spoke favourably about terrible crimes in Cesena and Singaglia, and he had no objection to justify the brutal assassination of legendary Remus by his own brother. The fact whether violence is a shameful or proper thing, and whether a ruler should resort to cruelty or not, is determined by the circumstances, in which it was used and the reason it was motivated by. It is especially acceptable when, with its help, the fidelity of people is achieved. In the same way, Machiavelli allowed for hypocrisy, assuming that utile counts more than honestum. In his opinion, politics has nothing to do with morality.

Therefore, Machiavelli inspires to ask the question: is there well-used cruelty? One of Machiavelli's especially favourable and simultaneously

9 Alois Riklin, *Die Führungslehre von Niccolò Machiavelli* (Bern: Stampfli, 1996), 100.

original interpreters, Erica Benner, indicates that his following thought should be particularly emphasised: activities to maintain order can be seen as cruel, but they are used for establishing order in the country. They constitute an essential link for social peace and human well-being. In times of the depravity of morals and morality declining, corruption and other evil indiscretions should be treated with appropriate severity and firmness. The point is to rigorously and even ruthlessly eliminate pathologies that threaten social order.[10] According to Machiavelli's defenders and supporters, this doctrine is therefore about consistently conceived pragmatism in the prudent organisation of the public sphere, and violence is only a necessary and immediately used tool here. Reading Machiavelli's writings brings a philosophical justification of violence in politics while Hobbes points to the relationships between violence and power, as well as between law and violence, which is developed in the concept of Rousseau.

A breaking point in reflection on violence is the dialectics of creation and destruction, as well as building and destroying, suggested by Hegel. For Hegel, history is a synthesis of construction and destruction. Hegel not only justified violence with a historical mission, but he believed that long-lasting peace is conductive to laziness. He wrote: "War has the higher significance that by its agency the ethical health of peoples is preserved (...) Just as the blowing of the winds preserves the sea from the foulness which would be the result of a prolonged calm, so also corruption in nations would be the product of prolonged, let alone ‚perpetual' peace."[11] Hegel's issue of violence is developed and complemented in the issue of rational freedom. The more obvious cunning and shrewdness of intersubjective reason are, the more they are confronted with this extreme form of incomprehension, which pure violence constitutes in the relationships between people. The cunning famed by Hegel can be understood as the most effective protection of reason against violence. For Hegel, the state is a form of cunning that can stop vitality of irrational violence and neutralise it. Here, it uses its own instruments: rational and general rules, standards and institutions of public life legitimising common validity. Then, Marx derives from this intellectual source by proposing his own original paradigm of power as organised violence.

10 See: the chapter "Is cruelty always criminal?" in Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's Prince. A new reading*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), especially 116–117.

11 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Zasady filozofii prawa*, trans. Adam Landman (Warsaw: PWN, 1969), 317. Hegel turns out to be an antagonist of Kant, pushing the idea of respecting the law on a global scale to establish a universal, global peace. See: Immanuel Kant, *Projekt wieczystego pokoju* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Polskiego Towarzystwa Filozoficznego, 1995).

However, among none of the thinkers, it is possible to find as consistent and spectacular apotheosis of violence as in the case of a Marxist, Georges Sorel. According to Sorel, bourgeoisie that is cowardly by nature ceased to be important in the class conflict because it refrained from using violence. Violence is a manifestation of life force, courage, vitality and creativity. Creativity is violence, those who produce are taken into account, other groups are described by Sorel as parasitic. In this approach, the conflict is a driving force of development. When the class conflict comes to a standstill, it is tantamount to slow decadence and leads to the collapse of civilisation that loses its vitality. Sorel tries to provide the proletarians' postulated violence with a kind of sublimity in the name of the ideal of a fight for liberation. In his opinion, violence is a momentous act and requires working on its accompanying prejudices.[12] The influences of Hegel and Marx, who believed in the dialectical power of negation, that opposites do not destroy each other, but they are replaced, and that the opposites do not block development, but they encourage it, and that good can emerge from evil, are clear here, but according to many philosophers, they were not right. After all, violence can manifest itself in imposing ideological options, negating the right to criticism and disagreement, in the absolute monopoly of value-based communication carried out by some social instance, especially by the state and its apparatus.

Human condition and violence

Although, in the philosophy of Nietzsche it is certainly not a leading thread, the problem of violence undoubtedly appears to be present in Nietzsche's philosophical anthropology. Zarathustra postulates the arrival of a superhuman and claims that man is what must be overcome. Nietzsche valued spiritual over physical values. The sophisticated and creative power (Macht) is respected by him more than primitive and uncouth physical force (Kraft). This Nietzsche's superhuman (Ubermensch) itself had nothing to do with pure force or brutal aggression.[13] In order to understand Nietzsche's category of the will to power, the

12 Georges Sorel, *Rozważania o przemocy*, trans. Marek J. Mosakowski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2014), 183, 288. Despite its radical nature this position found popularity among many historians of ideas and philosophers such as Stanisław Brzozowski, Chantal Mouffe and Mario Tronti.

13 A similar view is expressed by Jacob Golomb, who in the article „Jak zdenazyfikować Nietzscheańska antropologię filozoficzną" in *Studia Philosophica Wratislaviensi*a (2010) no. 5/3 presents a number of arguments supporting this hypothesis.

concept of self-conquest is important.[14] It is not about self-conquest experienced by ascetics, in case of whom it is difficult to talk about self-affirmation, but only about repressiveness against each other. In the context of an ascetic attitude, there is a thread of violence perpetrated on the power itself, the creative potential of the individual.[15] Meanwhile, man overcomes himself when he manages to liberate himself from the values imposed by the public. Slave morality characterises people that may even be endowed with greater physical strength, but less spiritual power. The latter is the ability to live in their own way, authentic existence, and rejection of all subordination, it is fearlessness towards fate. It is not that violence which Nietzsche was disgusted by. He was against glorifying the idea of the army and militaristic tendencies in the country. However, it should be admitted that on the other hand, Nietzsche valued masculine and combative virtues, expansiveness, activity, courage, and determination, and he distinguished weak individuals, frightened of strong types, predisposed to ruling and having much of barbarians in themselves. He decided that man is of animal nature that should be expressed by instinctive and passionate action, by no means focused on the satisfaction of others. He despised ethics which regarded pity as a virtue. He attacked Christianity for glorifying pity and suppressing natural drives. He recognised life itself as his highest objective.

The psychoanalytic tradition indicated the relationships of culture and violence. Reflections on Erich Fromm's violence prove to be inspiring. Fromm rightly noted that man is the only animal for which his own existence is a problem which it is impossible to escape from. This problem can be solved in two ways: productive and unproductive, by giving primacy to Eros or Thanatos in us. They are simply two radically different ways of living: the one associated with creativity and the other related to destruction, although it seems that in the human world, both of them overlap, they occur in parallel, which may give the illusion that they determine each other. Basically, each individual who is spiritually, intellectually and emotionally healthy has the gift of creative life that Fromm defines as productivity. The latter is the realisation of the potential in man, his rationality and ability to love and be close to the other. The denial of this attitude is non-productive orientation, largely based on distance, empowerment and aggression. Fromm distinguishes here four types of a pathological personality: receptive, exploitative, hoarding and mercantile types. Violence that is always a negation of freedom,

14 See for example: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Tako rzecze Zaratustra*, trans. Wacław Berent (Poznań: Zysk i s-ka, 2000), 103.

15 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ludzkie, arcyludzkie*, trans. Konrad Drzewiecki (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Zielona Sowa, 2004), 96–101.

especially characterising the exploitative character, is not conductive to creativity.[16] Fromm soon added to these characterological orientations the following: necrophilous and narcissistic orientation. The first one means the passionate liking for transforming the living into the dead, destruction for the destruction itself, the obsession with violence and destruction, worship of pure power and fascination with death.[17] According to Fromm, the intensification of violence is promoted by a heartless and weary consumer society.

One of the best-known philosophising sociologists dealing with the category of violence is Wolfgang Sofsky. Most of his considerations at the starting point take the hypothesis of the irreducibility of violence in the world, not only in the social dimension, but when it comes to the most primary level of being human. Violence is part of our condition, regardless of the social roles, which we participate in, and whether we have power, or we are subject to it, or whether we are excluded from this relationship. According to Sofsky, man is a victim of violence by the very fact of having a body.[18] The growing needs and constant deficiencies condition the antagonisms that are a driving force of human action. Therefore, violence is a necessity and it is of primary nature: where man is, violence is.

Relationship between power and violence

When studying the relationship between power and violence, it should be noted that power is usually understood as action focused on the situation that other people follow the will imposed on them (according to the approach of Wolter, Carl von Clausewitz or Max Weber, for whom power means demanding the recognition of the subject's will against the resistance of others). However, not all philosophers believed that violence is an indispensable attribute of power. The philosopher emphasising the importance of distinguishing them was Hannah Arendt. In the opinion of the twentieth-century philosopher, the main task of power is not the protection against violence, which does not mean that it cannot fulfil this function, but it does so while implementing its main activities. The Arendt's implicite power definition implies that the current system of governance in countries is an aberration, that is a distortion, because it is increasingly based on violence that replaces the power resulting from

16 See: Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1990), 57–70.

17 See: Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 372.

18 See: Wolfgang Sofsky, *Traktet Uber die Gewalt*, (Frankfurt am Mein: S. Fischer Verlag GmbH, 1996), 11.

voluntary political cooperation between people. In Arendt's concept, power is something diametrically different from violence and it does not need it. According to the philosopher, violence destroys power. The essence of the latter is common action increasing the total power of individuals and enabling the implementation of more demanding objectives.

In turn, an Italian thinker, Giorgio Agamben argues that life was given to the authorities and its associated violence. Following Walter Benjamin, the philosopher indicates the fact that the state of emergency, which we live in, became something common, a permanent situation. This state means a special way of organising the society through the so-called biopoliticisation of naked life.[19] Bioethical issues are drawn into the sphere of politics, and certain life forms (in order to define it, Agamben introduces the original category of homo sacer) are arbitrarily considered cursed. No one can be confident about their status and safety. In fact, there is nothing certain in the state of emergency, the precedent is a custom, and decisions are issued arbitrarily interpreting ambiguous reality.[20] As a consequence, it is difficult to distinguish between acting against the law and compliance with it, and criminal activities are considered normal – it is enough to suspend old legal standards and move them to the area of exception. In such conditions, every meanness, which ceases to be qualified as a crime, is acceptable, and space for a silent triumph of violence is opened. Life, which has been ruthlessly politicised, has never been so fragile, and this applies to both the totalitarian system and the modern form of democracy.[21] The totalitarianism violence is a particularly poignant, hard to pronounce in normal human language and shameful page in our history. According to Agamben himself, we should be currently much more interested in a sub-human than in a superhuman, about whom many scientific papers were created. The dramatic situation of unnecessary man results from the fact that he has no political status, which places him beyond the law. In modern societies, there are many people deprived of elementary protection of the government and the state, those who are sent to the country of origin as a result of one ordinance with the immediate enforceability, without the possibility of an appeal procedure, and at best, they are treated as invis-

19 Michel Foucault previously pointed to the progressing inscription of human life into the mechanisms and calculations of power See for example: Foucault, *Historia seksualności*, trans. Bogdan Banasiak, Krzysztof Matuszewski (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1995), 25.

20 Agamben in his book Stato di eccezione presents specific episodes and various examples from European history and culture, confirming the occurance of a state of emergency. Giorgio Agamben, *Stato di eccezione* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2004).

21 See: Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer, Sovereign power and bare life*, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 22–24.

ible for some time. Unnecessary people, introduced to the political scene as a naked life for a moment, can be brutally expelled from it at any time.

Communicative function of violence

It is also possible to see violence as a form of communication. Jan Philipp Reemtsma draws attention to violence as an act of communication – it then becomes a social activity capable of destroying not only individual bodies, but also social relationships. Unlike Arendt, for whom violence is mute, he believes that individual acts of violence: intimidation, wars, tortures, terrorism tell us a lot, and they are supposed to provide the receiver with information and constitute a kind of communication with the use of not very elegant means. During the war, every military action is, at the same time, a message, e.g. regarding a possible vision of the future, if the opponent decides to capitulate. Every single victory is a warning, and every raid is an incentive to declare obedience to the government continuing the war.

Dropping the bomb on Hiroshima was a gruesome message in the war realities. During the bombing of Belgrade by NATO troops, it was explained as a form of communication for inhabitants to show how ridiculous it is to continue to support the Milošević's regime. Reemtsma points to a communication triad of violence: there is the perpetrator, the victim and the observer that can be the general public. This also applies to criminal violence (especially in the Mafia violence edition). According to the German thinker, the sense of inventing the criminal law is to limit the communicative violence form.[22] Violence always causes terror and fear, it affects the imagination of all who learn about it and follow its development. This is the effect expected by the perpetrator. The penalty imposition is tantamount to rejecting the "invitation" to communication.

Summary and final conclusions

Theorists of violence emphasise that its motives and types are manifold. Its most poignant and extreme variant which has been implemented so far was the violence of totalitarianism, which was described by Arendt, Jean Amery, Sofsky, Agamben or Reemtsma. Their conclusions are very consistent, the main points recur. People were imprisoned and brutally killed because their existence was considered unnecessary. The victims were renamed into defenceless bodies, and they were subjected into the experimental objects unable to react, within the framework of which it

22 See: Jan Philipp Reemtsma, *Das Recht des Opfers auf die Bestrafung das Taters – als Problem* (Munchen: C.H. Beck Verlag 1999), 70.

was demonstrated that everything was possible. As noted by Arendt and Sofsky – the absolute power we deal with in concentration camps invalidates customary thinking that survival depends on man himself. This power causes absolute powerlessness. Death in the camps was omnipresent and permeated everyday life, and extermination became something normal. The figure of mass death – the muselmann – is a being capable only of mechanical reflexes, remaining in the state of spiritual and intellectual agony, immersed in complete apathy, devastated, abandoned, and experiencing social death before it suffered physical death.[23] For Sofsky and Reemtsma, the concept of absolute power constitutes a leitmotiv of research on the reality of concentration camps. For Arendt, the camp is a place of radical evil realisation.[24]

To sum up: is it possible and, if yes, how is it possible, to explain human inclination to violence? Philosophers are aware of the fact that the most obvious hypotheses can be difficult to justify, one of them is that violence is a specifically human phenomenon. According to Arnold Gehlen, man always exists in some culture, in a state of danger and imbalance. In a situation where culture is not given once and for all, but it is something endangered and it does not give us a sense of stability, man may fall into barbarism. A flourishing landscape can be transformed into desert and steppe landscapes, man may become a vandal and destroy the culture which is not as obvious as nature. It is important because the advanced civilisation can destroy far more than the less developed civilisation. As Joachim Herder argued: man is an invalid of his 'force majeure', a being marked by a lack, but he has means of compensation, like language. In other words – man, due to his weaknesses, becomes strong and works to equalise purely organic poverty. However, everything that determines the superiority of man, ingenuity in relation to other creatures, is also a threat to him, after all, the essence of violence includes the fact that it needs tools. Man is the originator of sophisticated techniques for obtaining food and at the same time, sophisticated destruction techniques. It is a being who controls itself, not directly, but owing to others, also through certain inhibitory standards. It lives in a world dominated by the standards; civilisation means that man becomes predictable. The society heavily relies on obedience. The painful experience of the past century of totalitarianism, however, resulted in the situation that obedience ceased to be a virtue, and it began to be identified with mindless and

23 The shocking characterization of the Muslim figure is presented by Jean Amery in the book *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* (Munchen: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1970), 38 and Giorgio Agamben in Agamben, *Quel che resta di Auschwitz. L'archivo e il testimone* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2008), 42 and further.

24 See: Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism. Imperialism, part two* (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace, 1985), 227.

dangerous compliance with top-down regulations, the applicable law or system. Perhaps this is why we currently observe the erosion of authority, discipline and upbringing. It is forgotten that entering the service of authority does not necessarily mean the mindless and passive disclaimer of responsibility that it can constitute responsible, thoughtful and voluntary state of being faithful to the standards we recognised as our own. Meanwhile, as Gehlen noted, there is a certain defused drive energy that must find its outlet and is left many times due to the lack of standards and undermining the institution, defused through violence.

The variety of discourses on the role of violence in the human world does not allow to formulate simple conclusions. We know that we will not eliminate it from the physical and social world. We also understand that it is better to refer to it properly than to ignore it, which is not always possible. There are proposals inspired by Hegelianism or anarcho-syndicalism to see violence as a multidimensional phenomenon, because as a catalyst for reforms or a tool in a noble fight, it can contribute to development. However, as Michael Oakeshott already emphasised, all violent and radical projects to build a new better world ended in disaster for humankind.[25] We must be vigilant every time we encounter an attempt to justify violence, but on the other hand, it seems that the a priori adopted renunciation of all violence may be utopian. Regardless of the fact whether we agree with the thesis that our civilisation shakes in its foundations or whether we think it is quite good, it is more reasonable to assume that it must be prepared for various threats, also including those that do not exclude the explosion of violence. It is difficult to ensure full compliance as to the methods that we can use in confrontation with these threats. However, let us not forget that civilisation is the will to cooperate and it is expressed in respect of standards. We are people of this civilisation until we act in accordance with its fundamental (ethical, legal and moral) standards.

The violence category in modern philosophy in its theoretical aspect is associated with the praxis level. The considerations on power and violence in the historical and philosophical, as well as ethical and political aspects undertaken over the centuries can be summarised in a parallel of references to the present day, even in the context of stateless persons, relying on the whims of the authorities, on the territory of which they live, or the threat of terrorism. However, this is a topic which is worth being considered on its own.

25 Cf. Michael Oakeshott, *Wieża Babel i inne eseje*, trans. Adam Lipszyc (Warszawa: Fundacja Aletheia 1999), 192.

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Streszczenie

Artykuł zawiera krótki przegląd wybranych stanowisk referujących problem przemocy w filozofii nowożytnej, rozumianej jako namysł, aż do czasów współczesnych. Zarys poszczególnych ujęć i koncepcji uzupełniony został o autorską refleksję nad istotą przemocy.

Słowa kluczowe: przemoc, władza, człowiek, Machiavelli, Hegel, Sorel, Nietzsche, Arendt, Sofsky, Reemtsma, Agamben.

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The Category of Violence in Modern Philosophy

Abstract

The articles contains a short overview of selected theories which address the issue of violence in modern philosophy until present day. An outline of these conceptions is supplemented with author's reflection on the nature of violence.

Keywords: violence, power, man, Machiavelli, Hegel, Sorel, Nietzsche, Arendt, Sofsky, Reemtsma, Agamben.

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