Monika Murawska
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1975-0330

Paulina Sosnowska
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6559-8160
Editors

The Multiformity of Violence

The category of violence is unavoidably ambiguous, and the very moment we make an attempt at clarification or disambiguation an acute question arises, from what perspective should it be considered, philosophical, psychological, sociological, anthropological, or pedagogical? We then realize that even if we decided on one perspective, it is unavoidably intertwined with the others, which opens up a manifold field of possible approaches. Thus, the agenda adopted here is modest: to present a specific spectrum of accounts of violence and reveal its multiple facets that are inscribed both in the existential, individual dimension and in a socio-cultural context. The presented perspective depends on each individual author's stance and the direction of her/his analyses. The path we have chosen in our considerations leads from violence in political power relations to symbolic forms of violence – from theoretical accounts of political oppression to descriptions of ontological, metaphoric or symbolic forms of violence, from Nietzsche to Foucault, from de Sade to Agamben, and to Arendt.

In *Les 100 mots de la philosophie*, edited by Frédéric Worms, we find the proposition that any too precise definition of violence is endangered by being reductionist and leaving out some essential aspects.[1] Such a claim (obviously tautological) does not prevent the author from giving into the temptation of formulating his own definition of violence: an action becomes violent, regardless of its voluntary or involuntary character, when it threatens the physical or psychological integrity of a person and modifies her experience of herself, others and the world. In this way, violence undermines our trust in being-in-the-world, the basic confidence that enables

---

1) Frederic Worms, ed., *Les 100 mots de la philosophie* (Paris: PUF, 2013), 43.

us to live in it. If we look at this problem from a different angle, we can say that our being-in-the-world is always connected with violence, and that it brings us to the awareness of our vulnerability and mortality, of ourselves and of others. Violence, then, can be understood as an essentially intersubjective sphere, and, what follows, an essentially political realm. This refers us also to the question of the relationship of violence to power, but also to guilt, forgiveness and promise.

The task of exploring the intersubjective dimension of violence has also been undertaken by the editors of *Studia Phaenomenologica* in a volume devoted to the problems of conflict and violence.[2] They posed a legitimate question, whether the phenomenon of violence can be feasibly grasped only in the perspective of intersubjectivity, and they drew our attention to the context of affectivity, e.g. anger. When we speak of affectivity, we have to refer also to the question of corporeality, the acts of inflicting and suffering pain, risking one's life and physical oppression. The focus on the very phenomenon of violence follows from the phenomenological perspective. It is conspicuous in the later thought of Emmanuel Levinas, where the human body becomes a condition for the possibility of both subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Both are necessarily intertwined with violence, whose source is the other. Here, violence is understood as fundamental for the constitution of subjectivity: the-one-for-the-other. The other is also connected with what Levinas calls *persecution*: "a trauma, violence par excellence without warning nor a priori, without possible apology, without logos."[3] Subjectivity is sensibility – an exposure to others, a vulnerability and a responsibility in the proximity of others. Subjectivity is, in Levinas' thought, always a hostage.

At this very place, another facet of violence has to be mentioned. Violence can be, as Andrzej Leder insightfully demonstrates,[4] implicit, covered, concealed or disguised. He understands violence as a certain power that puts on different masks: we have known its disguise as the seducer and its mask of moral blackmail, but nowadays it appears in the disguise of the discourse of demystification. Discourse demystifying domination itself became a disguise of domination. The immediate post-war period was the time of suppressing hostile and aggressive impulses in the name of democratic institutions, which were symbolically sanctioned and legitimized in the social consciousness. This legitimization was possible by means of identification of law with the father-figure. But the discourse demystifying violence, as well as combating the omnipotence of patriarchy, undermined this kind of sanction and legitimization. Therefore, along with the vanishing father-figure, this legitimization slowly disappears, as Leder claims, referring to the conceptuality of Freud and Lacan. Along with the disappearing father-figure, violence becomes more and more apparent. It is very clear if we look at our public spheres, and also the virtual ones. Let Leder speak for himself: "I think that it is our duty to think about the consequences of the repression of all the dynamics, all the force connected with aggression, anger, and hatred. I am persuaded that if we will not do so, we may be one day surprised, as the societies of the *fin de siècle* were when – in August 1914 – the First World War started, opening the door for all the horrors of the following 40 years."[5]

If Leder is right, it is our task to reconsider the meaning of violence, which, whether grasped as a concept, category or phenomenon, never loses its presence and actuality. Otherwise, "ridiculous the waste sad time/stretching before and after,"[6] which awaits us, as Thomas Stearns Eliot puts it in *The Four Quarters*.

---

2) Cristian Ciocan, ed., "On Conflict and Violence," special issue, *Studia Phaenomenologica* 19 (forthcoming).

3) Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Duquesne: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 205.

4) Andrzej Leder, *Był kiedyś postmodernizm* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2018).

5) Andrzej Leder, "Is Hatred a Major Factor Determining the Contemporary Social Imaginary?," *Gestalt Theory* 39, no. 2/3 (2017): 311.

6) Thomas Stearns Eliot, *Four Quarters* (New York: Harvest Special, 1971), 154.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

It is impossible here to present the whole range of dimensions and approaches released once we undertake the task to speak about violence. In this volume we decided to follow the authors and their choices and focus on the most spectacular philosophical descriptions of violence, among them those of Nietzsche, Foucault, de Sade and Agamben. We would never claim that they cover all the semantic fields connected to the concept of violence. For instance, we do not touch on feminism, ecology or art here, being fully aware of offering a discrete intellectual path rather than systematic presentation.

We start this path with the most general considerations. For Jean-Michel Salanskis, violence is a "slippery" and elusive concept that escapes all attempts of precise definition. For Salanskis, we encounter violence any time we direct ourselves towards the world. While violence is something we usually resent and fight, it can also be a source for the emergence of new realities. We open this volume with these preliminary thoughts, followed by more concrete approaches. We can see how each of them can be understood as an unfolding path that branches of onto another one. In this way they can be read as intertwined, as one refers to another, nevertheless changing the perspective and conceptual configurations.

Paweł Pieniążek develops a profound historical analysis of Nietzsche's approach to violence. He interprets violence in Nietzsche in two opposite ways: negative and positive. The first is understood as a critical concept and refers to the degenerate will to power, becoming the basis for the genealogical critique of nihilistic history. The second, positive, is present both in Nietzsche's political projects and in his conception of Dionysian metaphysics. Pieniążek conceptualizes violence in Nietzsche as a fundamental principle organizing and connecting various elements of his philosophy. Violence is an interpretative category of his accounts of metaphysical, historical and socio-cultural analysis. But there is more to it: the Nietzschean bi-dimensional concept of violence deeply affected later twentieth century philosophical thought.

Katarzyna Dworakowska's contribution can be read as a development of Pieniążek's analysis. She undertakes the problem of violence in the genealogy of Foucault, which, interpreted in the Nietzschean terms, is based on the conflict of forces. Violence emerges here in two dimensions: firstly, right in the middle of the war of forces, and secondly, as an outcome of this interrelation. Both aspects allow us to think about violence as a relation and to question the standard conception which reduces our understanding of violence to brutal force or aggression.

The problem of war reappears in a different dimension in Urszula Zbrzeźniak's contribution. She describes violence mostly as a phenomenon of the institutional order and law. She analyzes the problem of political conflict, such as civil war, which is neglected in political philosophy. Putting the Greek concept of *stasis* at the center of her reflection, Zbrzeźniak compares the political philosophies of, among others, Arendt, Agamben, Loraux and Mouffe, in order to reconsider our understanding of the political realm as "radical politics". With Loraux as her intellectual ally, she attempts to redefine the contemporary philosophy of politics: instead of being understood as a sphere of peace and consensus, where war appears as a marginal phenomenon (as in Arendt or Mouffe), she proposes to conceptualize politics as a community of conflict, which Loraux calls "brothers in *stasis*".

Paulina Sosnowska's contribution to the philosophical problem of violence approaches the philosophy of politics from a different angle: the relationship between politics and myth, especially the modern versions of state foundational mythologies. Sosnowska analyzes two recently published documents from Hans Blumenberg's posthumous legacy: *Präfiguration* (2014) and *Rigorismus der Wahrheit* (2015). In her account, they reveal unpredicted complications for the interpretation of Blumenberg's philosophy of myth (*Work on Myth*), as well as his political stances. The focus of the analysis is Blumenberg's critique of Hannah Arendt, put in the wider context of twentieth century approaches to political mythology.

Well within the Blumenbergian spirit present in the *Work on Myth*, although not necessarily identical with his stances, is Sasha Biro's contribution. Following Jean-Luc Nancy's and Luce Irigaray's insights into how to move toward an understanding of violence as inherent in foundational myths, Biro's endeavor is directed towards undermining the strict opposition between *mythos* and *logos*, fable and truth, the irrational and the rational. Biro draws our attention both to the representational function of myth and its essentially disruptive character, and, with full awareness of the ideological dangers hidden in the repetitive nature of myth, to how it can contribute to our healing from the desire to surpass it once and for all.

The problem of the connection between myth and violence reappears once more in Emerson Bodde's contribution. He proposes an original interpretation of Walter Benjamin's *Toward the Critique of Violence*. Going against both established readings of Benjamin and Benjamin's self-understanding, Bodde's attempt focuses on an anti-mystic and anti-quietist reinterpretation of divine force. Using the interpretative lens of Spinoza's differentiation between *potentia* and *potestas*, and Sorel's idea of the proletarian general strike, Bodde reads Benjamin, partly in accordance with Žižek, toward creating a *practical* and *critical* political concept describing human plurality with solidarity being its essence.

Our Thematic Section finishes with Krzysztof Matuszewski's interpretation of de Sade's work. Here de Sade is approached as a naturalistic fatalist or dark gnostic, deeply convinced of the structural monstrosity of the world and of the unavoidable catastrophe that is the destiny of human existence. De Sade, presenting himself as a metaphysician and moralist, reveals social conventions and the limitations they carry, as well as our instinctive reactions with which we desperately fight with the terror of standardized behavior and arbitrary principles. Matuszewki shows that if we take de Sade's *oeuvre* as subversive and dwelling on the edges of insanity, this insanity turns out to be inalienable from human existence. In Matuszewski's view, inspired by Battaille's reading, de Sade appears as a transhistorical writer. An important question arises here: is de Sade (as surrealists claimed) a liberator? Does the transgressive nature of his texts go beyond the postulates of moral and socio-political liberalism and touch the very core of human existence? Eventually, can they be read as *commedia*?

In the Forum Section we present two essays. Daniel Burston's paper focuses on the similarities and differences between Freud's theory of primary and secondary psychic processes, Karl Stern's theory of the scientific and poetic modes of knowledge and Iain McGilchrist's account of the differences between left and right-hemispheric competences, values and ways of being-in-the-world. What is at stake in these comparisons is the shape of our contemporary culture, and as a consequence, of the kinds of individuals who are thrown into it. Josef Früchtl writes about artistic research and considers four basic models of the relationship between science and art. The author attempts to answer the question of whether artistic research nowadays fits into (one of) these models.