

DOI: 10.14394/eidos.jpc.2022.0034

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On the Ontology of Violence

Abstract

The article raises the question of constant violent acts, primarily military, despite the longtime general condemnation thereof. This turns us to the problem of ontology of violence. The approach suggested here is based on understanding violence as labor with the excessive use of force. This is related to the understanding of force as the truth. Thus, for the archaic mind, force (and violence), the sacred, and truth were different projection-implementations of one entity. The civilizational world model contains in its basis not the principles of a single truth, but the principles of collaboration and coexistence of different stances instead of the submission to one entity. The old model of violence as a way to participate in the object's truth and to confirm the subject's sacred status stays effective. This paper argues that violence has an ontological dimension in the old model of a single truth, but cannot have it within a civilizational approach.

Keywords

violence, ontology, force, power, war, rationality, single truth

Understanding the current war between Ukraine and Russia inevitably unfolds on a variety of levels: geopolitical, political, ideological, civilizational, cultural, national, economic, social, moral, and finally, simply phenomenological (event); and this list cannot be considered complete. The incompleteness of an event makes it necessary to place it in the context of history in order to evaluate it. Such a correlation between an event and its past is based on two main methodological principles: on direct continuity (the continuity of history) and

on analogy. Both principles are obviously problematic in terms of providing reliable knowledge. Correlation with the immediate past, firstly, does not allow us to single out the new in the modern; the very consideration of the past in the context of history suggests that everything that happens today has long-standing historical prerequisites. Secondly, it inevitably presupposes its interpretation and a free (in a sense of being always arbitrary) horizon of investigation.¹ The complexities of the analogic method are well known from the theories of critical thinking and argumentation,² where numerous attempts to establish the logical legitimacy of a wide variety of analogies and modeling methods based on them are invariably met with weighty criticisms. It is all the more problematic in history, where culture differences and circumstances are often ignored for the sake of external similarity (comparison with religious wars, especially the Thirty Years' War, World War II, the Yugoslav Wars). Nevertheless, despite their logical imperfection, both methods are actively used, since in fact, there is no alternative way to comprehend the essence of what is happening.

I write about this to indicate that I fully understand the difficulties that any researcher faces when referring to ongoing events.³ At the same time, as a citizen of Ukraine, I cannot ignore the ongoing war; I cannot think of anything else. In this article, I focus on only one aspect of the ongoing war today, namely, the violence associated with it. War in general is often seen as synonymous with violence and as its embodiment in social and political action. It is also well known that religious and civil wars are distinguished by particular cruelty (the level of violence), but the explanations for this phenomenon are located in a very wide spectrum (from the mythical wars between the brothers – Romulus and Remus, Eteocles and Polynices – to the neurophysiological level), which reduces the reliability of such attempts to explain this phenomenon. I would like to note right away that for me, the bitterness of the military confrontation and the degree of violence used primarily by the Russian army against the civilian population of Ukraine (I cannot predict how the Ukrainian army would behave in relation to the civilian population of Russia, since military operations take place only on the territory of Ukraine), was a complete and extremely painful surprise.

This war has already offered an excessive (should it even be possible to assume the existence of a measure), number of instances of violence. This is not the first war, and certainly not the first time humanity has encountered violence in war. Ideologically, violence has long been condemned, it has been sentenced, it has arguably for the most part been taken out of the bounds of the humane world and civilization, but it is not possible to get rid of it. This is the key point from which to proceed. The most optimistic forecasts do not assume an end to violence in the near future. So why is this the case, and do we really understand its nature?

The main paradox associated with the problem of violence can be formulated as follows: although violence (and war) has been condemned, probably from the very moment of the emergence of collective reflection, (at least for Western civilization where we can find condemnation of violence already in Homer), it nevertheless resumes again and again. Moreover, it is often regarded as something inevitable and even necessary, and today there is no possibility of overcoming it completely.⁴

1) In our case, for example, it remains completely unclear to what period the consideration of the confrontation between the population of the territory of present-day Ukraine and Russia should be limited: post-Soviet (since 1991), Soviet (since 1917), imperial (since 1654), ancient or primordial (for example, from the ninth century); all variants can be easily found in contemporary accounts of what is happening on both sides.

2) See for example Copi, Cohen, and McMahon, *Introduction to Logic*, ch. 11; Guarini, Butchart, Smith, and Modovan, "Research on Analogy."

3) "Die Eule der Minerva beginnt erst mit der einbrechenden Dämmerung ihren Flug," Minerva's owl begins its flight only at dusk. Hegel, *Philosophie des Rechts*, 17.

4) I can only partly agree with Arno J. Mayer: "In a distant and not so distant past, violence 'was part of a natural and God-given order,' an unquestioned and anonymous 'social practice,' not in need of 'justification'. ... It was only in early modern times, and

War and violence have their supporters among theorists (e.g. Machiavelli, Malthus, Hegel). The recognition of the regularity and necessity of violence is based mainly on the belief in the limited capabilities of the human mind, as well as the imperfection of human nature and the structure of the human community. The practical supporters of war and violence, of which there are many more, probably come from approximately the same convictions or very close to them.

The existing literature on violence can be divided into two types, the first of which should include studies of a predominantly descriptive or moral-evaluative nature, and the works of the second type are theoretical in nature and represent models of the development of the human species and the role that violence played in its development. Works of the first type are most often a presentation of the sequence of historical events, and contain important statistical data. Works of the second type are much more diverse; they seek to reveal not only the prerequisites, but also the causes, references to different periods in the history of human society, and seek to reveal the mechanisms by which certain types of behavior formed: including the formation of violence both in the early stages of human society and forms of its manifestations in the modern world.

Here we can discover the second paradox, the essence of which is that the solution to the main paradox, as a rule, is seen precisely in those grounds that are put forward by the supporters of war and violence. Researchers see the ineradicability and constant resumption of wars and violence primarily in certain features of the existence of the human community and related mental, neurobiological, social, and other properties of human beings, as well as in the influence of other people on them. In this sense, a human being is usually considered akin to those between other biological species, which are also characterized by an intra-group hierarchy, a struggle for territory, for the possibility of interbreeding with compatible mates, to leave offspring, and so forth. In the animal world there are also inevitable rivalries and conflicts within one biological species due to their involvement in the “food chain,” but violence⁵ here has mechanisms to limit and control expressed mainly as forms of ritual fights or symbolically threatening behavior, while cases of killing individuals of their kind (unlike people) are extremely rare. It has been suggested that humans are perhaps the only biological species lacking a mechanism for inhibiting aggression in relation to individuals of their own species. Koestler, in his famous article, suggested that *Homo sapiens* is a pathological product of evolution.⁶ In this assumption, he developed and sharpened the observations made earlier by Lorenz,⁷ who nevertheless gives examples of other species for which the absence of the mechanism is characteristic.

The second type of literature on violence also includes theories, the authors of which sought to comprehend the reasons for the indicated uniqueness of the species to which we belong through reconstructions of the forms of the biological evolution of the human being, its cultural development, and the features of its different forms of social practices and institutions. René Girard and Walter Burkert's theories can serve as examples of

particularly in the eighteenth century, that violence was summoned to justify itself at the ‘bar of reason,’ along with the ‘divine right of kings and religion.’ The idea that violence, both domestic and international, was barbaric and unenlightened, and the faith that it was destined to vanish, continued to gain ground during the nineteenth century.” Mayer, *The Furies*, 71.

5) I agree with the approach expressed very articulately by Jan Volavka: “*Violence* denotes aggression among humans. It is not used to describe animal behavior; however, human behavior can be described as either violent or aggressive. The term *aggression* tends to be used more frequently in biomedical or psychological research, whereas *violence* (or *violent crime*) is more commonly used in criminology, sociology, law, and public policy. This interchangeable usage (depending on context) of the terms *aggression* and *violence* is not generally accepted. ... Thus, in this book, the two terms have the same meaning; their use is largely governed by their context.” Volavka, *Neurobiology of Violence*, 3.

6) Koestler, “Man – One of Evolution's Mistakes?”

7) Lorenz, *On Aggression*; (Originally published in 1963 as *Das sogenannte Böse: Zur Naturgeschichte der Aggression*). But Lorenz expressed this thought, it seems much earlier, in his first book: Lorenz, *Er redete*, translated in English as *King Solomon's Ring*.

models reconstructing forms of the development of human culture. Both researchers focus on the role of violence, reconstructing its mechanisms based on the clarification of many evidences of past and present culture. As a result, each offers his own general theory of the origin and meaning of ritual and myth. These theories, like other earlier ones, were subject to significant criticism, which to a large extent led to their development, modification, and refinement in subsequent years. Yet, none of these models has become generally accepted.

Today, the causes of violence continue to be actively studied, but mainly in terms of identifying neuro-physiological, neurobiological, mental, social, and other prerequisites for this type of attitude to the world.⁸ Within the framework of this article, it is not possible to offer even a short list, and even more so an analysis of theories of violence, so I will limit myself to considering their general methodological scheme in order to show its fundamental incompleteness and the need for a fundamental change in the approach to the problem. I will start with descriptive types of research, then move on to evolutionary theories, and lastly turn to attempts at a philosophical understanding of violence.

Most analyses on the origins of violence known to me have focused on the study of the psycho-physical types of people known to have used violence: their family and social conditions of upbringing and formation, the analysis of their participation in socio-economic life, the role of life circumstances, and so forth. Violence in this case is understood rather narrowly and exclusively in the legal field, for example Farrington, in his research, offers the following definition as “the most basic”: “violence is behavior that is intended to cause, and that actually causes, physical or psychological injury.”⁹ For his analysis, he identifies a number of concepts: risk factors that increase the likelihood of violent acts being perpetrated by an individual and antisocial potential, some of which also lead to violence.¹⁰ It should be noted that methodologically, this approach comes down to a certain kind of retrospective: the study of known cases of violent behavior involves clarifying the life circumstances, mental, and social conditions in which the perpetrator was formed and existed. The traits of such an individual that are repeated in multiple instances are distinguished as forms of “antisocial potential,” and repetitive life circumstances are considered as “risk factors.”¹¹ This is a completely methodologically correct approach in the natural sciences, but in the humanities it gives an exceptionally probabilistic result, in addition, it is in principle incapable of explaining the nature or essence (for all the conventions of the terms “nature” and “essence”) of violence, and does not set for itself the task of understanding it. Roughly speaking, the conclusions of such theories can be reduced to the thesis that the worse the conditions of a person’s upbringing and formation,, and the lower their place in society, the higher the likelihood that they will be violent. What this approach is unable to explain is the reasons why the subject, given such initial data, chooses from all possible forms of behavior precisely aggression and violence, and for example, not humility and obedience. An important detail that most studies of this type agree on is that violent acts peak during adolescence. Many explanations have been proposed for this empirical observation, the main being high testosterone levels,¹² age-related changes in capabilities (physical, social, and so forth),¹³ and the importance of environmental influences.¹⁴

8) See for example Flannery, Vazsonyi, and Waldman, *The Cambridge Handbook of Violent Behavior*; and Renzetti and Edleson, *Encyclopedia of Violence*. Both contain an extensive bibliography of the subject.

9) Farrington, “Origins of Violent Behavior,” 19.

10) Farrington, “Antisocial Personality,” and Farrington, “Developmental and Life-Course Criminology.”

11) “Generally, the probability of violence increases with the number of risk factors.” Farrington, “Predicting Adult Official and Self-Reported Violence,” 83.

12) Ramirez, “Hormones and Aggression.”

13) Cohen and Felson, “Social Change and Crime Rate Trends.”

14) This is the most popular explanation. See, for example, Farrington, “Age and Crime.”

The second type of theories explaining the causes of violent behavior, with all their differences and depth, methodological rigor, and focus on the latest data from a wide range of sciences (from paleontology and archeology to psychology, the history of religions, and theories like structuralism or game theory) are unfortunately, just as far from revealing the nature of violence. They do not set out to philosophically understand violence in modern human society. In fact, these theories can be reduced to the history of the formation of certain practices of violence in human society, but not to the philosophical understanding of violence itself. They are built according to the scheme that Nietzsche once criticized in his *Genealogy of Morals*:¹⁵ something arises from a need, then the need disappears; but by force of habit, the existing practice is preserved, sometimes changing its role and meaning.¹⁶ The historian of Greek religion Walter Burkert offers a reconstruction of the pre-Greek stages in the formation of human culture.¹⁷ The key point in his reconstruction is the kill, which he sees as an activity that requires special forms of cooperation and practices that are alien to pre-hominoid apes. This transition to a new form of community provisioning forced the redirection of existing intraspecific forms of aggression to external objects: restructuring the entire spectrum of behavioral strategies, territory protection, distribution of prey, mating, and reproduction. Intraspecific aggression, previously associated primarily with intragroup hierarchy, mating, and sexuality, now had to be directed at the object of hunting (the kill). Necessary skills (e.g. patience, planning, and group cooperation), for which the pre-hominid apes were not socially prepared, were reinforced through ritualization.¹⁸ Rituals became new behavioral codes that allowed hunting, planning, and coordination, as well as the leaving of females alone during this time. As a result of the transfer of intraspecific aggression to prey, its anthropomorphization occurred. At the center of the ritual is the act of killing, which contains motivation, emotional shock (horror), and its transformation into joy (celebration). This practice, which focuses on killing, has created a myth as a mechanism for perceiving and comprehending the world. The main subject attended to by the German researcher remains the origin of religion, while violence acts only as a tool to achieve the goal: a distorted (transformed) form of intraspecific aggression.

René Girard proposed a different model for to explain violence in human society.¹⁹ The key point of his theory is sacrifice as, on the one hand, the embodiment of violence, and on the other hand, as its cessation. The mimetic nature of behavior and desire, which is so often used to explain the spread of violence among adolescents, is one of the fundamental pillars of his theory. Through this the researcher provides a new substantiation of the old thesis about rivalry and struggle (violence) as the basis of society. Another form of rivalry and conflict based killing is blood feud. The chain link of blood feud is a threat to the entire society.²⁰ Sacrifice

15) "One sees straightaway that this primary derivation already contains all the typical traits of the idiosyncrasy of the English psychologists—we have 'utility,' 'forgetting,' 'habit,' and finally 'error,' all as the basis of an evaluation of which the higher man has hitherto been proud as though it were a kind of prerogative of man as such." Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 25.

16) In no way do I wish to belittle the significance or depth of these theories. For example, I sincerely admire Walter Burkert. Rather, we are talking about the fact that they were created by specialists in other fields and did not set for themselves philosophical tasks. Moreover, for a philosophical approach to the problem of violence, the presence of such theories is not only important, but even necessary, firstly, they summarize a colossal amount of empirical material, since in many of their observations and conclusions their authors demonstrate amazing observation, methodological rigor and insight.

17) Burkert, *Homo necans*, see also the English translation Burkert, *Homo necans, The Anthropology*.

18) "Hunting behavior became established and, at the same time, transferable through ritualization..."

These rituals were indispensable because of the particular thing they accomplished. ... Through solidarity and cooperative organization, and by establishing an inviolable order, the sacrificial ritual gave society its form." Burkert, *Homo necans, The Anthropology*, 35.

19) Girard, *La Violence et le Sacré*. English translation: Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*.

20) "Vengeance, then, is an interminable, infinitely repetitive process. Every time it turns up in some part of the community, it threatens to involve the whole social body." Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 14–15.

breaks the chain of violence by choosing an innocent victim, similar to members of the community, but at the same time not included in the community. Their being collectively murdered or expelled (an act of violence) closes the circle of tribal revenge. This collective violence gives rise to society and indirectly creates the sacred because all members of the collective recognize the innocence of the victim and at the same time the need (which requires justification), to use violence against them.. Here Girard essentially gives a new interpretation of the conflict between the genus and society, which Hegel proposed in his analysis of Sophocles' *Antigone*.²¹ Girard's texts often characterize violence as the subject of action, and as an irrational, but independent force with its own features and forms of behavior. The author says almost nothing about the nature of violence itself (except about the mimetic nature of desire as its source).

Another example is Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of violence, which he lays out in his book on the novel by François Rabelais.²² Violence plays an important role in this work, since it appears often in the novel itself, but Bakhtin interprets it as an organic part of the opposing cultures in any society – the official (serious) and the popular (laughter, laughing).²³ Here, the violence of the official culture appears as the oppression and restraint of community members by strictly defined norms and forms of behavior, and the violence of laughter culture is expressed as an ambivalent form of the living force of an eternally dying and reborn people. They meet the death of an individual with laughter since it is only a link in the growth of a whole people's life. Grassroots violence is the original force: the celebration of food and sexuality, which is relegated to official culture as forms of protest and rebellion. This force clearly manifests itself in the limited space and time (the merry time and the merry space of the carnival), which official culture allocates for it, but it exists forever, and of course, Bakhtin does not have this conclusion; from time to time it breaks through into revolutions and riots.²⁴

Mikhail Bakhtin, with such an interpretation, finds himself on the borderline between the historical-cultural and philosophical understanding of violence so, a philosophical reading of his book is possible. There are not so many philosophical works that are specifically devoted to the problem of violence, but philosophers have turned to the study of the very phenomenon of violence throughout history.²⁵ It became, in one form or another, a subject of consideration by Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Marx and many others. Unfortunately, it must be admitted that in almost all cases, violence was considered primarily within the framework of political or moral philosophy. Violence in general is predominantly seen as a psychological or social (political) phenomenon. Only in Plato, Hobbes, Hegel and Marx can I see some elements of the ontological understanding of violence. But they also have nothing like a systematic development of the problem of the ontological dimension of violence.

This applies equally to modern research. In his early article on violence, Walter Benjamin from almost the very beginning, limits its consideration to the plane of law, although he goes beyond the designated bound-

21) Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 267, ff. paragraph 448. (The German text is not divided into paragraphs, Part VI. *Der Geist*, section A. *Der wahre Geist. Die Sittlichkeit*, chapter a. *Die sittliche Welt. Das menschliche und göttliche Gesetz, der Mann und das Weib*). See also Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 58–61.

22) Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*.

23) This study was created in the second half of the thirties, and, in my opinion, retained the philosophical orientation of the author, who sought to comprehend the causes and possibility of the Russian revolution with all the horrors and disasters of violence associated with it. To express this desire directly at that time meant certain death, especially since Bakhtin already wrote it in exile. Subsequently, this study underwent two significant alterations – as a dissertation and as a new version for publication, which, as a result, was published only in 1965.

24) “Laughing truth ... degraded power.” Ibid., 92–93.

25) “There exists, of course, a large literature on war and warfare, but it deals with the implements of violence, not with violence as such.” Arendt, *On Violence*, 8, n. 6.

aries.²⁶ Only in the concept of “divine violence” introduced by him at the end of the article can there be seen, if desired, a hint of ontology. In fact, his research focuses on the question of whether violence as a means can be justified outside of the ends. Within the framework of the same dichotomy of ends and means, Arendt also considers violence in her famous work, created under the influence of the protest movements of students in 1968.²⁷ Georges Bataille approached the consideration of violence in some of his books, more precisely, in almost all of his works he gives various forms of attention to the problem of violence. But even he did not raise the question of its ontological dimension. The brilliant studies of violence by Balibar²⁸ and Žižek²⁹ are limited almost exclusively to the political side of violence. They rightly point out the illegitimacy of considering violence exclusively in the categories of law, since the violence from law itself should be taken into account. This somewhat ideological approach rather asserts that the question of violence should not be considered closed; it brings us back to the formulation of the question by Marx, as well as the anarchist Bakunin and Tolstoy who were far removed from him, but both considered law to be legalized violence. It is appropriate here to recall the expressive embodiment of the idea of violence perpetrated through law within a number of works by F. Kafka. In short, the main problem that worried most philosophers (from Augustine to Žižek), was the question of whether violence can be justified if it is directed against power (the violence of war was condemned, but not analyzed).

How legitimate is it to raise the question of the ontological dimension of violence? A definition cannot be the answer here, besides – all researchers agree on this – it is not at all easy to define violence, and even more so being.³⁰

Violence has accompanied mankind throughout its history, and we have enough data to say that it took place among the *Homo sapiens* species and in the prehistoric period.³¹ Violence somehow exists as a form of behavior and is most often considered in this capacity. The concept of “violence” has two interrelated features: firstly, “violence” is an evaluative characteristic in itself, and secondly, “violence” has a double intentionality; it is always directed at an object (even if violence is applied to oneself), and along with this it presupposes an end (not always clear, but necessary). This second trait is related to the first in the sense that violence is always an excess action; an excess expenditure of energy that must be justified. Therefore, violence is often considered as only a tool to achieve a certain end, denying that it is an independent essence.³² Due to the necessary dependence of violence (as a tool) on its ends, this form of behavior is usually attributed exclusively to rational beings, therefore it is not customary to talk about violence in wildlife (for example, attribute it to predators), and even more so to assume its existence outside the organic world.³³ True, there is also a view from the side of the victim; then it is possible to talk about institutional violence: violence from certain structures or institutions. Žižek calls such violence “objective” and contrasts it with violence of individuals (“subjective” violence), in addition to singling out “symbolic” violence within the framework of “objective.”³⁴

26) Benjamin, “Critique of Violence.”

27) Arendt, *On Violence*.

28) Balibar, “La violence.” See in English, Balibar, *Violence et civilité*.

29) Žižek, *Violence*.

30) For the difficulty of defining “violence” see the excellent article by Salanskis, “Violence.”

31) See for example Kelly, *Warless Societies*; LeBlanc and Register, *Constant Battles*; Keeley, *War Before Civilization*; and Otterbein, *How War began*.

32) “The very substance of violent action is ruled by the means-end category, whose chief characteristic, if applied to human affairs, has always been that the end is in danger of being overwhelmed by the means which it justifies and which are needed to reach it.” Arendt, *On Violence*, 4.

33) Ibid., n. 4.

34) “Subjective violence is just the most visible portion of a triumvirate that also includes two objective kinds of violence. First,

As a result, a rather complex picture emerges in the center of which is the person as a subject of violence (inflicting violence) and usually as the object of violence (subject to violence). This state of affairs contributes greatly to the confusion that accompanies the study of violence and hinders its being understood. The introduction of persons always creates problems. Considering them as a biological being or as a subject with free will changes the general framework of a study. Similar difficulties arise with the mind; it remains unclear for researchers whether the goal-setting process belongs to the realm of the conscious or the unconscious, since each area requires completely different methods of analysis.

With that said, we will first consider the action itself without its actor. Violence is a form of conscious action that involves the application of certain forces or efforts to an object as a rule in order to influence or change it (to some extent adapt it to the needs of the subject). This definition is too broad, since it is more consistent with the concept of “labor,” but on the other hand, violence as an action carries all the generic features of labor (in the broad sense) and can be considered as its type.³⁵ There is nothing unnatural in considering “labor” as a generic concept for violence (after all, any violent action contains labor: the application of force). Among the many characteristics of labor, for us in this case, the most important feature is that labor brings changes to the object, but it also changes the subject, the worker. From the point of view of action, violence differs from labor primarily in some excessive application of force, the absence of a kind of “respect” for the object, and the denial of its right to be independent; violence not only adapts the object, but seems to seek to change its nature, to deprive it at least of its independence.

Another aspect is the difference in the characteristics of the object in the application of forces (labor). Such a difference as passivity (simple material) and activity (complex dynamic formation) seems to be essential. I see the clearest difference as for example that between influencing inanimate material (the creation of a ceramic bowl, a marble or copper statue, a stone structure) and the constantly changing, including self-reproducing (agricultural processing, a river dam, even simple room cleaning). In the first case, the material is given a new shape, as Aristotle pointed out, and it remains unchanged over time in accordance with the strength of the material. In the second case, a complex, dynamic object as a rule receives a restriction in one respect, and an incentive to activity in another, which in principle can also be considered a new form, but only partially; it is important that the preservation of this form requires constantly renewed efforts. It is wrong to think that violence is always aimed at destruction; on the contrary, it is most often constructive (although it is not perceived as such), if only because of its often-noted instrumental nature, and its subordination to the goal. Destruction by violence is always aimed at the destruction of the former state or status, everything that does not correspond to the new goal is subject to complete destruction. Since the term “violence” is used only in cases where the action is directed at a person or a group of people, the object of violence should be characterized as active, but the nature of the relationship, as we will see, remains the same as in the labor process.

Now we can return to the question of the presence of a certain excess of force in violence, in contrast to labor. Violence, like labor, is a certain influence on the nature of the object, but in the case of violence, this excess of effort requires an explanation or justification: a simple ordinary “why so?” The theories of the origin of violence mentioned above, the theories of Girard and Burkert are also largely devoted to explaining this

there is a “symbolic” violence embodiment in language and its forms ... Second, there is what I call “systemic” violence, or the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems.” Žižek, *Violence*, 1–2. It should be noted that Žižek does not always strictly adhere to the terminology; he often calls “systemic” violence simply “objective.”

35) Note that the word “labor” is also applied almost exclusively to people. The exception is animals working for people and some colonies of insects (ants, bees). In both cases, we have a clear example of anthropomorphization; in the second, a weighty part of metaphor is added to it.

excess. According to Girard, violence is based on the mimetic nature of human desire, which gives rise to rivalry, struggle, and then blood feud. And it is violence's excess of effort that becomes a threat to the existence of society, because violence turns out to be too energy-consuming; the institutions of society cannot function normally with an endless chain of violence (blood feud). Therefore, according to Girard, violence closes in on itself; there is an artificial replacement of its subject (now the whole community becomes it), there is an artificial choice of a suitable object (simultaneously similar and different, both a member of society and at the same time outside its framework). This is the original nature of sacrifice, the act that creates and periodically maintains the integrity and security of the community. The creation of a community is a by-product of the creation of the sacred. The sacredness of the action and the victim itself is created by the fact that all members of the community realize the innocence of the victim and feel guilty for shedding their blood. The violence of sacrifice thus "turns on" social mechanisms, which is possible only due to an excess of energy (effort and force).

The weak point of Girard's theory is the assumption of guilt for the killing of an innocent victim. This assumption seems too sentimental for the archaic community. Rather, such a community may be afraid to shed the blood of the victim due to the presence of a life force in this blood. The rite of purification from spilled blood, as well as its magical properties, are widely represented in Greek mythology (and somewhat differently in Germanic). This is a long-standing tradition that can be seen in the attitudes toward executioners even in later societies, although he only carries out the sentence of society, but inevitably comes into contact with the blood of the victim. Where Girard is certainly right, is in his assumption that violence is solely responsible for the creation of the sacred. It is created and affirmed because it is the result of a given manifestation of power. Strength or power are the true attributes of the divine. This is expressed by Euripides in *The Bacchae*, where the main argument of Dionysus in opposition to the rational king of Thebes, Pentheus, is the murder of an opponent. The same can be seen in the figure of the hero (demigod): the strong can never be just a man.³⁶ Perhaps the cult of athletes in Greece also had a basis in this notion. Probably a characteristic feature of a person, his main feature in the archaic picture of the world, was his weakness. This is another feature why the existence of a murderer in the community without a rite of purification posed a threat to the entire community. The murderer could be seen as a real or potential carrier of divine power, so his presence split the community from the inside. It was important to distribute this power to the entire community, which served as a rite of collective violence, and sacrifice, that is an act of affirming the divinity of the community (more precisely, the deity's benevolence towards the community). Again and again, the ritually repeated sacrifice confirms the presence of the deity in the action of the community. This is partly the mystery of Homer: he condemns the war, but at the same time affirms the direct connection of strong heroes with the deity; and they immediately become weak when the deity retreats from them (in fact it is the contrary: their weakness means their being abandoned by the deity). But that is not all, not only is strength an attribute of the deity, but also truth. Force is thus an instrument, an attribute of truth, and vice versa.

This is why archaic society is so dependent on ritual. Ritual is always a show of strength, both individual and collective. The ritual reproduces the hero's actions and through the ritual (demonstration of power), the society retains strength and truth (i.e. the favor of the gods). Therefore, blood feud appears as a duty for members of the clan, a murdered relative weakens the entire clan; left unavenged it poses the threat that the gods may withdraw their support. But the individual murderer who has committed an act of revenge is also dangerous, as he can pull favor on himself and change the internal norms of behavior. To resolve this crisis, a rite of purification is required, thus violence is the affirmation of a connection with the gods, and purification is a redistribution of this connection to the society. Therefore, the basis of blood feud and the basis of cleansing rites

36) On the formation of the hero cult in archaic Greece see, for example: van Wees, "From Kings to Demigods."

is equally based on a demonstration of strength. Ritual, as Burkert remarkably shows, is the consolidation of a strong action, an action of strength, and an action that brings success. In fact, the ritual is a kind of “operating manual” left by an ancestor-hero. Ritual teaches a certain course of action, and in some cases it plays the same role in modern society. It establishes (the rite of passage) and secures the status quo, acting as the guarantor of its preservation (its power, truth and divine favor). For this reason, the community cannot accept a murderer who has shed blood without purification: he will not behave with the rest as an equal, and if his behavior is not ritualized, then no community norms will stand. Naturally, during the transition from a family society to a tribal one, all these processes undergo a complex transformation redistributing power to the community (but partially preserving it for the clan). Now it becomes clear why the application of force changes not only the object, but also the subject. It becomes understandable that humanity tends, despite all the moral invectives against violence and its general condemnation, to return again and again to violence as a solution to problems. Violence affirms its actor in the status of their truth, their right (in the archaic sense), and their superiority.

It can be assumed that initially humans, in the era of their separation from nature and in opposition to it, were forced to recognize its superiority in cases where the force of nature directly opposed them. They could not openly resist drought, a hurricane, an unfavorable climate, illness, flood, volcanic eruption, and even simply the conditions of the area – the steppe, mountain, forest, sea – all these were strong entities that they could not change, which they had to obey; nature’s strength and power was greater. This thesis should not be understood as a return to the idea of the deification of nature by ancient people. They deified not nature, and not its phenomena; they deified and singled out those powerful subjects of nature that threatened their existence. And they turned to other strong entities for support. Therefore, it was quite natural for them to believe that each locality had its own gods, even if they have the same names. Conversely, different names did not always mean different gods. Apollo in Attica and Apollo in Arcadia or Ionia was not one and the same, even if the identity of the name was preserved, he was both one and the other at the same time. There was no contradiction here because in a different land, climates, and circumstances, he acted differently. How indeed is strength the same and different when used in different places and circumstances. It was the force and the threat lurking in it that became gods, and not those forms of manifestation (natural phenomena) through which this force manifested itself. This force had an ontological power, which today we divide into two different categories, and we are surprised at the connection between them (physical strength and truth), while before it surprised no one. An individual and a whole community could assert themselves and survive in such a world only thanks to complicity: the help of divine power. That is why holidays and many other actions carried so much unreasonable violence (which Bakhtin noted); it was a form of self-affirmation of oneself in the world, and self-affirmation of one’s truth (the favor of God and the gods). This truth was not made anywhere out of violence. It was always there. Therefore, violence primarily attracts adolescents and it is not at all a matter of the bad influence of peers. Adolescence is a period of the manifestation of a person’s physical strength with an almost complete lack of social status. Acquiring status through strength is the easiest and most ancient path for young people. Most initiation rites are based on it.

But it is not just teenagers who are affected by the ancient perception of strength and power. Even modern teachings cannot completely overcome the force-as-truth argument: for example, the difference between a natural approach to law and a positive one lies essentially only in the question of what exactly is the source of power (positive law interpretations see it in a really existing structure, while natural law originally believed its origins were in God, and today it tends to interpret it as the highest principle, for example, justice).

There is no doubt that man’s understanding of the world and his understanding of himself has changed significantly in comparison with the archaic era. The old equation violence (force)=sacred=truth has lost its effectiveness (I want to say “power”) in the space of a reasonable picture of the world. The mind developed as

a mechanism for finding new ways, and each time different, to achieve the same goals that were previously provided with the help of divine power with ritual as a guarantor of this help. Of course, a person does not look for a new solution every time, this is the difference between a simple conscious action and a creative one. Modern man, one might say, ritualizes the use of his own mind. The old method of solutions through direct force is still relevant today and used in a number of circumstances, often out of habit; it is just that this method has ceased to be the main one. As a result of these changes, the word “strength” acquired a second, new meaning in language: along with the old meaning of simple physical power, the meaning of “strength” arose as finding the way to a goal, and to solving a problem (strength of the mind). This trend arose from the very beginning of the emergence of culture; it is already represented in the image of the “cunning” Odysseus. The former strength and violence became almost as useless in the sphere of reason as the power of muscles and physical strength in the game of chess. Violence as such is generally relegated to the background in the world of reason, culture, and morality. “Strength” can still find some use there, but in its excess in relation to the other, violence serves as barbarism and savagery in the sphere that can be conventionally designated as the sphere of “spiritual,” in the world of art, the world of creativity and freedom. The forces of nature no longer frighten human society to the extent that they used to; they no longer pose such a terrible threat to the human community.

Why, then, does violence remain effective? Why is it so difficult to get rid of violence for the modern world? It seems that there should be no place for violence in the world of the mind. The use of direct force and violence has a significant spatial and temporal limitation. The world accessible to man has become much larger than in the archaic (pre-historical) era, and power is significantly lost with distance.³⁷ In addition, the modern world is built on difference; it tends to use different elements while maintaining their specialization, so the modern army differs from the hoplite phalanx primarily due to the specialization of each element (let us leave the technical equipment aside for now, although it also serves the process of differentiation into specializations). Multi-stage chains of cooperation and integration make it possible to domesticate vast territories and keep them for a long time. And force is applicable only here and now: this is the reason for the collapse of great empires, because it is possible to hold vast territories only through integration, indirect ties, and direct violence. They do not withstand the joining of many truths, for them the truth remains one. The one truth is the truth of direct power. But the world becomes too big for it because the distance increases the need for strength.

But still, one should not think that we have already overcome the archaic idea of the world and now fully live in the vast world of the spiritual and beautiful. This is still a long way off. We are still children of nature who have just discovered the presence of a new dimension. As already mentioned, we are at best only partially trying to introduce new values of creativity and rationality using the old methods of ritualization. With some degree of conventionality, we can say that the previous perception of force has remained in us as in other biological entities, and we are only learning to control the manifestation of our biology by means of rationality. But somewhere at the genetic level, this old understanding of the world persists and often (all too often), guides our behavior; the mind gradually strives to push it aside, which is why it probably only strengthens in the sphere of the unconscious. Perhaps there are saints or sages who have completely conquered the animal nature in them-

37) The modern world is more complex, so much in it depends on indirect connections, for example, knowledge from the theorist A passes to the designer B, he passes it on to the engineer C, he betrays it to the worker D, and only after that it falls into the hands of the one who uses it, E. Here the “distance” is not kilometers, but mediating links. Violence is effective only directly between A and B, although there may be tens of kilometers between them. It can serve as a threat to the third (who is not directly involved in the conflict), but its effect is weakened. It is, as it were, translated into a plane of psychological fantasy and can lead to a variety of consequences, both to humility and fear, as well as active opposition and indignation. In this sense, Russia directly influences only Ukraine, and it is very regrettable that this influence is significantly weakened on other countries (and this is exactly what it seeks).

selves: they can control their physiology, but this does not apply to ordinary people. Even the most spiritual, the most advanced people are aware of the presence of ancient impulses and reactions in themselves. But their superiority so far is only in the fact that they are aware that they have such desires, fears, and reactions, and they try to resist them, though this is already a lot. But probably most people do not realize this and take such ancient reactions of their nature as the voice of their mind. They are constrained in many ways by the norms established in society, but in the absence or weakening of such control, they tend to simply return to solving problems through force. This largely explains the terror of revolutions and the pleasure that public executions aroused in the crowd.

It should also be taken into account that different cultures, peoples, and societies do not move synchronously along this path, and each society, in this regard, remains very heterogeneous. This movement of rejecting the understanding of force and violence as truth can be traced, for example, in the history of the gradual rejection of corporal punishment: at first, this process affected only the elite (nobility), then it spread to all full-fledged citizens, then to all adults including women. Eventually, the way was slowly being paved in relation to the upbringing of children, but it still cannot be said that corporal punishment has been completely eliminated even in European society. Just two centuries ago, even the great teacher who determined the methods of education and training for the next century, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, did not think of teaching children without corporal punishment.³⁸

The rejection of violence as the principle of asserting the truth of the “elder” was given to European culture through the terrible experience of revolutionary, civil, and religious wars which were distinguished by an unprecedented level of violence precisely because not just superiority, but they defended truth by means of violence. Only when experience made it absolutely obvious that it was no longer possible to impose the truth in this way, especially on the whole community (although it is sometimes possible for an individual), violence began not only to be condemned, but the search for specific mechanisms for its displacement began (such as a new understanding of law, new forms of state power, new grounds for relations between the sexes, and new principles of family organization). The new model as a whole can be characterized as cooperation, and coexistence taking the place of domination and subordination. But from pronouncement, even from awareness to realization, there is a long way to go. It is necessary to find and master new mechanisms of interaction, to create new institutions that will make it possible to implement these principles. This search is only beginning now, and already found forms are still assimilated mainly, as already noted, by the old mechanism of their ritualization.

We can now return to the question of the ontological dimension of violence. Violence is a mechanism for acquiring a social and ontological status by a person in the old, but still valid, model of the world. This idea was expressed by Heraclitus in the famous saying “violence (*πόλεμος*) is the father of all things.” And if, according to Heidegger, the analytics of *Dasein* is an integral part of ontology, then here we are just dealing with one of the types of assimilation of this ontological status. Violence in itself is not ontological, but when viewed outside of ontology, it loses any meaning at all and turns into the behavior of a savage or a person with mental disorders. And this is certainly an erroneous conclusion because violence has its own logic; its use can be quite rational.

38) Pestalozzi was a supporter of the limitation of corporal punishments, but did not consider it possible to abandon them. Of the many examples, I will cite one as typical: “Wenn sich indessen Härte und Roheit bei den Kindern zeigte, so war ich streng und gebrauchte körperliche Züchtigungen. Liber Freund, der pädagogische Grundsatz, mit bloßen Worten sich des Geistes und Herzens einer Schar Kinder zu bemächtigen und so den Eindruck körperlicher Strafen nicht zu bedürfen, ist freilich ausführbar bei glücklichen Rindern und in glücklichen Lagen, aber im Gemisch meiner ungleichen Bettelkinder, bei ihrem Alter, bei ihren eingewurzelten Gewohnheiten und bei Bedürfnis, durch einfache Mittel sicher und schnell auf alle zu wirken, bei allen zu einem Ziel zu kommen, war der Eindruck körperlicher Strafen wesentlich, und die Sorge, dadurch das Vertrauen der Rinder zu verlieren, ist ganz unrichtig.” Pestalozzi, “Über den Aufenthalt in Stans,” 498.

The above, as it seems, can shed some light on what is happening today in the war between Ukraine and Russia. Ukraine has moved a little further along the path of refusing direct coercive influence, probably due to a number of circumstances: its geographical position, greater homogeneity of the population, smaller territory (which is important as this is how the territory is thought of by law), and the peculiarities of its historical development. For Russia, this difference in the Ukrainian way of life is perceived as a falling away from the truth, a monstrous delusion (heresy), and betrayal. Those forms of monstrous violence that Russia consciously uses in many ways as a method of waging war are nothing more than its attempt to substantiate its truth and realize both a political and metaphysical status – both for Ukraine and for itself. Ukraine seeks to overcome this old approach to truth, but it is not so easy to abandon the old one. Today, I in writing these lines, as a supporter of cooperation and the multidimensionality of truth who has never used violence against anyone, have an acute desire for a simple physical military victory. It is important for me to lead Russia to defeat through direct force (although without violence against specific people). But I would like the citizens of Russia to experience at least some of the hardships that the people of Ukraine endure today. And it is not at all easy for my mind, rational understanding, and cultural background to fight this temptation.

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