

Why Violence

Dr. Leonardo Peskin

To ponder such a broad topic as violence from a psychoanalytic perspective, we must stress that despite the existence of cultural, scientific-technological, and global wealth conditions that should lead to a decrease in violence, the opposite is true. In the last century and the beginning of this one we have witnessed the most brutal expressions of systematized hatred, which took shapes that show that culture, science, technology, and wealth were placed at the service of destruction. We can thus see that when a shortcut is opened that aims to relieve social discomfort by way of direct drive release, hatred linked to violence becomes a recurring symptom. This situation is compounded by the fact that the worst forms of extermination are justified by a consistent intellectual and legal order. Revenge, excess behavior toward the defeated, the indiscriminate production of victims who are treated like criminals, all these are typical examples of an attempt to satisfy the social craving for thanatic release. The deceitful invention of serious affronts suffered in the hands of "the others" justifies breaking the rules and creating exceptions to restore an alleged order. Such affronts tend to be the ideal pretext to justify killing and persecution. All resources are allocated to the annihilation of fellow beings accused of causing some social disaster in order to validate the release of a hatred disconnected from any sort of compassion.

There is a uniqueness to state violence, indiscriminate wars, terrorist killings, or attacks by radicalized groups that make no distinctions among their potential victims. We need to change the ethical principle underlying psychoanalysis, since victims have no responsibility in the attacks they suffer. Responsibility lies with an other who acts against them. An ethical and moral flaw in the culture of the attackers or in the society where the attacks take place facilitates the development of vicious behavior toward those who are deemed guilty of something. Such ethical shift subverts a trend, since psychoanalysis challenges subjects, first and foremost, by stressing their responsibility for their own fate.

Subjects are constituted within a culture that prepares them to be peace loving or aggressive. In societies prone to violence, they become violent. This is true of the societies that were involved in the most prominent events of organized violence worldwide. There we will find a history of teaching and encouraging individuals to be violent since childhood. We should recall here the Hitler Youth, Kamikaze schools, and Islamic terrorist training centers. In these cases we can see clearly that in order to create violent subjects, one must indoctrinate them by establishing violence as an ideal and developing a consistent discourse that supports their actions. Unfortunately, certain societies can also prepare their members to become victims. This is very important in cases of gender and religious violence as well as of violence against children.

Today, mass dissemination of violent ideals transformed into pseudo-rational discourse is based on two premises. One is the universal distribution of power by way of indoctrination, which gives each person the right to be the enforcer of these ideas in the context of organized groups. The other is the subordination of laws to ideals. In this way, the restraining, organizing role of the Law as a symbolic representative of the third is undermined.

The most disturbing type of violence is what we might call successful violence to distinguish it from individual or group violence resulting from the failure of symbolic containment. The latter form of violence emerges by chance in the guise of aggressive actions. Instead, Nazi violence, a paradigmatic example, was not the result of intellectual or cultural failure but of a highly rational

project. It was an effective sadistic intellectual endeavor that created the most sophisticated denigrated object. It turned fellow beings into things that showed no recognizable remnant of humanity and were bound for destruction. The more sophisticated the symbolic device that mobilizes the drive, the more cunning the consequences and the more subtly sinister the social organization produced.

Cultural changes that have occurred since Nazism have democratized thanatic power; scientific and technological progress has facilitated access to destructive power by developing high-tech products that are accessible to all. Subjects are freed from all responsibility thanks to a chain of terms that reverberate daily. "Emergency executive order," "state of exception," "due obedience," "No Man's Land," "collateral damage," all authorize ruthless acts. According to the Third Reich organization, any citizen was allowed to humiliate or kill a Jew or anyone opposed to the regime.

We should take into account that the Law accepted by the superego is neither measured nor unbiased. It is partial; it is a decontextualized interpretation of the entire body of legal doctrine. That is why we can say that, as a law, it has a certain senseless quality. We should consider here that ordinary people (and even learned people) neither know nor remember all the laws making up the legal system. It is that complex to define which laws must rule the acts of common people. The state, however, cannot resemble the superego. It cannot enforce partial or senseless laws. And yet that is exactly what we see in totalitarian regimes. In this context, it is worth quoting an expression of Herman Goering's "ethics": "*Recht ist, was uns gefällt*" (Right is whatever pleases us) (Wittgenstein, 1965). There may be no alternative. Paraphrasing religion, an upright man must be "fearful of the Law," and the latter must operate independently of circumstantial benefits. The state of exception (Agamben, 1999) must be avoided. The Law that grounds the judgment of a head of state or of an individual who has become a subject cannot be that of the superego.

The violence that concerns us here has a symbolic foundation – a discourse that situates subjects, guides their desire in the context of a project that endures over time, and has the perseverance and strength that facilitates the completion of the project. If we compare this description with what we know about the organization of paranoia, whose purpose is supported by judgments that are viewed as absolute certainties, we will find many similarities.

Another concern is the naturalization of violence. Despite having been experienced many times and studied in depth, state terrorism or organized cruelty surprises us every time as impossible to believe. Whenever humanity "witnesses" or enacts a new expression of devastating human evil, it is stunned by it. This is true at least for that portion of humanity that has been designed to reject cruel events by way of moral dams, decency, shame, and guilt (Nussbaum 2004). Still, in societies used to violence, nothing is surprising and everything is acceptable, and we are seeing more and more cases of habituation. Increasingly serious events are taking place that provoke indifference in those who are used to them, whose life experience has made them unresponsive.

A great number of recent events have proved the existence of a "sinister" social plasticity concerning state violence. I am referring, among others, to the deportation and killing of Jews in Nazi Europe and the forced disappearances and killings during the last dictatorship in Argentina. The sight of trains full of deportees on their way to the extermination camps did not provoke great astonishment. It is, perhaps, because of this naive surprise experienced in certain societies or the excess of tolerance to cruelty shown in others that we must remain alert and study these phenomena. Only if we remember and are forewarned might there be some hope of curbing inexorable repetition. Today we are less and less affected by the ever-present corruption of the state, by barbaric crimes, or by the fact that

the very sources of violence are the ones claiming they aim to eliminate it.

The most serious forms of mistreatment or lack of recognition of fellow beings' rights may be found in laws that target a certain group or discriminate this group from the rest of the population. We may draw the conclusion that violence is alarming when it is driven by a single discourse that ignores entire groups of fellow beings and seeks to deprive everyone who does not adhere to it from his or her rights and potentialities. While every discourse is symbolic, the modalities of single discourse put symbolism at the service of a narcissistic imaginary purpose that erases differences so that everything will suit the will of the master. For things to operate in this way, reality must be "flattened" (Peskin, 1994, 2000, 2008, 2015a, 2015b); the Ideal blends with the Law, and the will of the master finds no barriers.

The signs of the agreement between narcissistic ideals and the law constitute risk indicators. This type of deformation is typical of the superego, and the more a social organization resembles the superego's imperative, the worse its members' situation will be. While singular instances show that once it has been developed, the enforced discourse becomes an autonomous machine, it will always be operated by a leader. Another one of the specific attributes of our species or of the gregarious organization that characterizes it may be our tendency to follow someone who sets himself up as the leader in the locus of the ideal.

These ways of acting exceed psychosis, psychopathy, and any other nosographic category, since the blackguard condition transcends clinical structures. Unfortunately, the human species is prone to inducement by leaders and discourses. Human beings are constantly seeking leaders, and find them in anyone who situates himself in a position of leadership, that is, in the locus of the ego ideal. Symbols build the throne and award the scepter. Anyone who has it acquires power. Once slogans have been broadcast and the mob desensitized, the people or the army become automatons conditioned by these slogans. Any human group is vulnerable to this form of regression, and very little time, sometimes instants, is enough to erase thousands of years of cultural development.

For these modes of action to endure, they must be supported by a project with desires tied to a purpose. Like any desire, these have as their ultimate aim the expectation of satisfaction, whether or not it is achieved. Such satisfaction may be the most aberrant that one might conceive, or may even be inconceivable, as has happened often. Even so, it may last and be sought by common people who do not ask questions about what they are being compelled to do.

Preserving the quality of the discourse that organizes a society, in particular, the quality of its laws and customs (that is, of its ethics) seems to be helpful in preventing these phenomena. Nevertheless, drawing an analogy with the immune response in a body suffering from cancer, the symbolic aspect of a society, more specifically, its intellectual refinement, like the immune system, is at the service of the illness. Intellectual refinement contributes to advancing the worst projects, and sometimes shame, disgust, guilt, and sorrow are diluted by the "right reasons." The dams that serve as the basis of the repressive system are configured by the cultural parameters incorporated by the members of a society. Humans are, therefore, still fragile enough to require leaders who must protect the quality of the rules governing society and, in particular, make sure that they are enforced with a certain degree of equity.

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