

Violence and Revolutionary Subjectivity

Marx to Žižek

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this article is to explore the relationship between revolution and violence in Marxism and in a series of texts drawing on Marxian theory. Part 1 outlines the basic normative frameworks which determine the outer limits of permissible violence in Marxism. Part 2 presents a critical analysis of a series of later discussions – by Sorel, Fanon and Žižek – which transformed the terms in which violence was discussed by developing one particular aspect of Marxist thought. By teasing out the implications of revolutionary theory for the commission and permission of violence, it is possible to specify those points at which it tends towards excess. This in turn points towards limits that an adequate normative theory of revolutionary violence should establish.

KEY WORDS: *Benjamin, communism, Engels, Fanon, Lukács, Marx, revolution, Sartre, Sorel, terrorism, violence, Žižek*

. . . force plays another role in history [than as a perpetrator of evil], namely a revolutionary role; . . . it is, in Marx's words, the midwife of every old society when it is pregnant with the new; . . . it is the instrument whereby the social movement forces its way through and shatters the petrified, dead political forms . . .¹

In her respective treatments of the subject,² Hannah Arendt made two general remarks on the relationship between revolutions and violence. Writing in the early 1960s, she commented that, like war, revolution was indelibly marked with the occurrence of violence to such an extent that the two phenomena tended to mutate into one another.³ By the end of the decade, however, Arendt's essay *On Violence* introduced an important qualification. Violence, she argued, had not generally been regarded as *essential* to revolution until relatively recently. While theorists like Georges Sorel and Frantz Fanon gave violence a defining role in revolution, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had regarded it as incidental. Violence, according to their metaphor, was a midwife whose interventions may (or may not) be required during the birth of a new society out of the womb of the old.⁴

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The idea that violence was definitive of authentic revolutionary action was, she maintained, a relatively new one in the 20th century.

The central purpose of this article is to initiate a detailed examination of the place of violence in Marxist revolutionary theory and theories drawing on Marxism, thus to understand better their impulses and to map their limits. There are a number of reasons why this subject should still command the attention of political theorists. First, the theme of revolutionary violence has by no means entirely died out from influential currents of western, secular, leftist political theory. Although current analytical Marxism pays much less attention to questions of revolutionary transition than to those of the theory of equality and justice, witness Slavoj Žižek's recent explorations of the role of violence in Leninist Bolshevism and Stalinist totalitarianism⁵ and Ted Honderich's radical approach to democracy and terrorism.⁶ The theme of revolutionary violence therefore is still an issue in contemporary theory. It remains important too as a facet of recent revolutionary or quasi-revolutionary political practices. In particular, the emergence of a widespread focus on terrorism as a 'global' force demands fresh thinking about the way in which ideological frameworks, whether secular or not, lend themselves to deployment in justification of violence. For much of the 20th century, Marxism provided the most widely used conceptual framework for contemplating revolutionary violence, but there has been insufficient work in the literature on the history of political thought to map out analytically the ways in which violence is driven or permitted by Marxian theory (though there have, of course, been many denunciations of a more or less polemical nature). To initiate such a map will therefore be useful, finally, for those wishing to understand better the relationships between theory and practice in the history of revolutionary politics in the 20th century.⁷

Of course, it would be impossible to do justice in a single article to the full range of theoretical perspectives derived from Marxism and it is necessary to be selective. I therefore focus in the first part on texts by Marx and Engels themselves. Against this background, I then examine some of the more novel and, in many ways, idiosyncratic treatments of revolutionary violence that have since drawn on them. Part 1 outlines three basic pillars in Marx and Engels's theory of revolution, each of which contributes to defining a space where violence is permitted or demanded. The first two pillars are commonly associated in historical studies of communist revolution with the commission of violence in the name of a dictatorship of the proletariat. I argue, however, in part 2, that the third pillar, originating in the theory of ideology and class consciousness, formed the basis for innovations that created a further, different kind of permissive doctrine of violence. This forms an intellectually distinctive strand of thought. While elements of this may well be found in other texts, part 2 examines those theorists whose writings most clearly and explicitly exemplify the particular kind of argument that I want to explore, one that draws on Marxist theory, albeit in creative synthesis with other influences. Subsections focus on texts by Sorel, Fanon and Žižek (and, inter

alia, by Lukács and Benjamin). These thinkers developed novel conceptions of revolutionary violence by synthesizing a Marxian conception of revolutionary consciousness with influences from psychological theory and other sources. (I therefore leave aside for another time the discussion of such figures in the Marxist mainstream as Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin and Mao.) The article concludes (in part 3) with a discussion of the ways in which different strands of Marxian theory lend themselves to deployment in excessively permissive doctrines of violence, first, in relation to state terror, and, second, in forming a framework for anti-state terroristic violence. Throughout the article I use the term ‘permissive doctrines’ to denote the way these frameworks condone violence implicitly or lend themselves to deployment by theorists and activists seeking to validate the use of violence in later contexts.

1. Marx and Engels

... on the eve of every general reshuffling of society, the last word of social science will always be: ‘Struggle or death; bloody war or nothing. It is thus that the question is inevitably posed.’⁸

Conceived in the shadow of 1789 and on the eve of 1848, the idea of revolutions developed by Marx and Engels during the 1840s belongs to a tradition that assumed they would generally be violent events.⁹ The question asked of texts examined in this article is how they create a *permissive space* for this violence. In other words, what kinds of normative frameworks are established within these texts for the permission or commission of violence in the context of revolution? I should stress at the outset that the aim is not to present a synthetic picture of Marx and Engels’s views on violence that would represent their ‘final’ position or resolve self-contradictions or variations in their expressed views (which, naturally, reflected the different political exigencies with which they were engaged). My intention is to outline the basic conceptual frameworks that Marx and Engels made available to those drawing on their writings later on. In seeking to identify permissive space within Marxist doctrine it is not appropriate to restrict discussion to authors’ explicit treatments of violence and its norms, but to read texts from the point of view of political praxis. Once it is assumed that revolutions may need to be violent in order to succeed, then these texts can provide norms by which to justify such violence as is used.

The writings of Marx and Engels themselves offer three distinct frameworks, each with implications for the ways in which acts of violence might be seen as permitted to activists following the texts. Two of these – concerning, respectively, just ends and the mechanisms of historical change – are common to the Marxist tradition as a whole: the first *justifies* violence, the second *excuses* it. The third, however – concerning the role of the proletariat in creating ethical values – remained largely implicit until it was given a more central role in 20th-century thought.¹⁰ It was most strikingly developed as a theme by Sorel, whose *Reflections*

on *Violence* inspired both Georg Lukács and Walter Benjamin, later by Fanon and Sartre, and more recently by Žižek, whose ideas I examine in part 2. The third pillar seeks to *legitimate* authentic revolutionary violence by showing how it originates in a growing proletarian class consciousness (or, in Fanon's case, the consciousness of an anti-colonial peasantry) and contributes to its growth. In using three different terms – 'justification', 'excuses' and 'legitimacy' – to designate the different normative functions of the three pillars, I follow Arendt and Michael Walzer in their attempts to distinguish between three different kinds of moral defence claimed for violent acts: Arendt distinguishes 'justification' according to conduciveness to attaining just ends from 'legitimacy' which claims validity according to the appropriateness of its origins.¹¹ Walzer uses the term 'excuses' to refer to actions which may be permitted in the name of necessity, even where they may be such as could not be called just or legitimate.¹²

Justifying and Excusing Violence

In Marxism, permissive space is defined first of all by the justification of revolutionary violence as a *means* according to a conception of just political and social *ends*. If revolution involves the outbreak of a kind of war between contending political parties, then this first pillar defines the terms of *jus ad bellum* justifying those who initiate it.

First of all, revolutionary violence is a means of bringing into existence a just, communist society. A conception of human nature as *homo faber* gives Marxism its theory of just political ends:¹³ historical progress and political initiative tend, first, towards the complete realization of human creative powers and, second (in the last phase of revolution, the proletarian phase), towards the equal distribution of opportunities to exercise these powers.¹⁴ Communism is that form of society which most completely realizes both human creative powers and their fair distribution; it is therefore one in which 'the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all'.¹⁵ The impulse to create a communist society involves a negative moment too if it is interpreted, as Michael Levin suggests, as a defensive reflex by a brutalized working class.¹⁶ The practice of revolutionary violence portrayed by Marx in 'The Civil War in France', for instance, presents the violence of revolutionaries in the Paris Commune of 1871 largely in a defensive attitude beset by reactionary forces willing to perpetrate all manner of brutality.¹⁷ More generally, Marx argued, a temporary dictatorship of the proletariat needed to be repressive to the extent that the bourgeoisie resisted expropriation; but it was to be a short-term phenomenon different in kind and directly opposed to the alienated state form which it sought to destroy.¹⁸ Moreover, it has been argued that there is a textual and philosophical basis within Marxism for regarding members of the bourgeoisie as deserving the violence they will receive from the proletariat on the basis that they perpetrate violence themselves.¹⁹ More generally, as Merleau-Ponty famously argued, violence may

be seen as justified in Marxist theory to the extent that it proves in the actual event to contribute to the elimination of violent, exploitative human relations in the long run;²⁰ and Herbert Marcuse maintained that a rational appraisal of the probability of revolutionary success could be made in advance, permitting a 'historical calculus' concerning the validity of violence.²¹ Thus violence, to the extent that it is an instrument necessary in conducting revolution, may be justified as a means of achieving fulfilment of the creative potential of humanity and all its members and of casting off the social structures of injustice.²² To the extent that the realization of this goal imposes an overwhelming *obligation* on political activists, it would appear to justify whatever violent methods are required to achieve it without setting any natural limit.²³

The second pillar of a theory of revolutionary violence derives from the account of historical change in Marxism. While the attainment of communist justice may constitute *sufficient* grounds for regarding revolutionary violence as justified, it is not a *necessary* condition. The fact that earlier, imperfect though progressive revolutions appear to be justified (if not wholly *just*) in the Marxist narrative helps isolate this second pillar: it is the belief that revolution and sometimes violence are historically necessary. Earlier revolutions (the bourgeois revolutions in particular) did not achieve social justice for all members of the societies in which they occurred but they appear, nonetheless, as necessary occurrences, ultimately justified by the outcome of Marx's grand narrative since they contribute to the expansion of humanity's productive capacities, a necessary precondition of communism.²⁴

The validation of earlier, imperfect revolutions might therefore be conceptualized in terms of the 'just ends' of history; but the relationship between ends and means can only be an indirect one since the immediate and intended outcome of such revolutions is not what communists would call *justice* as such.²⁵ While bourgeois revolutionaries aimed to achieve a social order suited to capitalist accumulation and bourgeois power (not *just ends* in the Marxist view) the invisible hand of history reached beyond their intentions towards realizing the ultimate goal of communist society. It is this idea of history as an agent of change often transcending finite human intentions – rather than the often deluded and narrow intentions of revolutionaries – that provides the second pillar of a Marxist normative theory concerning violence: to the extent that violence forms a necessary part of successful, materially progressive revolutions, it is to be regarded as part of the natural process of human historical progress. As a natural process, the occurrence of revolutionary violence is beyond moral censure and, therefore, the revolutionaries are (at least partly) exonerated by the greater cause in which they participate but of which they may not be fully aware. (As I will discuss, the proletariat is unique in knowing its role in a full sense but this does not detract from the fact that its revolution is part of the natural unfolding of human destiny and to this extent beyond the language of good and evil.) Thus, the march of history towards just ends entails violence not only as a justified choice but also as an unavoidable

one. To use another term from the vocabulary of just war theory, this aspect of Marxist theory provides a doctrine of ‘necessity’ by which the actions of revolutionaries may be said to have been *excused* (rather than *justified* per se) by the historical circumstances which impelled them.²⁶ As Richard Overby puts it in reference to the Stalinist dictatorship, it could be used to achieve a ‘moral displacement that relieved [actors] of direct responsibility for their actions’.²⁷

Legitimizing Violence: Revolutionary Subjectivity

Communist ideas about just ends thus provide a theory of *jus ad bellum* available to justify revolutionary violence; and the materialist doctrine of historical progress provides a conception of *necessity*, sometimes excusing it. The third pillar provides a context within which to reinvent *jus in bello*, the norms governing just conduct in revolutionary hostilities. It does this by undermining existing moral norms and suggesting that new ones will be created to suit a new proletarian order. The strongest textual basis for the third pillar can be found in Marx’s period of closest engagement with Hegelian philosophy in the early 1840s, though it remains implicit thereafter.²⁸ This argument derives from the notions of ideology and class consciousness and their implications for the ethical worldviews respectively of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

In *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels argued that the ethical, legal, cultural and other ideas associated with particular historical eras reflect in their general form the interests of the social class dominating society at that time. With each new revolutionary moment and each transition from the old social order to a new one, the rising social class transforms not only socioeconomic structures but also the ideological superstructures which help justify the new order, bolstering its perceived legitimacy in the eyes of those participating in it. ‘For each new class which puts itself in the place of the one ruling before it’, Marx and Engels wrote:

... is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality. ... The class making a revolution appears from the very start ... not as a class but as the representative of the whole of society.²⁹

Thus, the ideals of natural right which animated revolutionary politics in France during the years following 1789 could be seen as reflecting the rising prospects and eventual political success of the bourgeoisie.³⁰ The rights of man and citizen, with their emphasis on property ownership, their conception of liberties based in the adversarial relationships of competing citizens and so on, were therefore to be seen, in light of Marxist theory, not as universal truths to be tested according to the knowledge of God or nature, but as meaningful from the perspective of bourgeois class interests.³¹ Marxism thus rejected the bourgeois pretence of a moral view from nowhere, insisting that it is always reducible in the last analysis to the interests of a capitalist somewhere.³²

By contrast, as Shlomo Avineri emphasizes, the proletarian interest is different from those of all previous social classes in that it possesses ‘universality’.³³ All hitherto existing social classes had an interest defined by their differences from those of both humanity as a whole and all other social classes. The proletariat, however, has a special historical mission in Marxism: because it is fundamentally and totally degraded in the capitalist system, because it is stripped of all positive attributes in which it might establish a positive interest, it is left with nothing but its intrinsic species-being (its humanity as such). If it may be said to have a ‘class interest’ at all, it consists purely in the negative desire to eliminate all other special interests on the basis of which it suffers oppression.³⁴ For the rest, its impulses coincide with those of humanity as a whole freed from the particularities of class interest. The ‘*positive possibility of German emancipation*’ is found, Marx writes, in:

. . . the formation of a class with *radical chains*, a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, a class which is the dissolution of all classes, a sphere which has a universal character because of its universal suffering and which lays claim to no *particular right* because the wrong it suffers is not a *particular wrong* but *wrong in general*; a sphere of society which can no longer lay claim to a *historical* title, but merely to a *human* one, which does not stand in one-sided opposition to the premises of the German political system; and finally a sphere which cannot emancipate itself without emancipation from – and thereby emancipating – all the other spheres of society, which is, in a word, the *total loss of humanity* and which can therefore redeem itself only through the *total redemption of humanity*. This dissolution of society as a particular class is the *proletariat*.³⁵

While the perspective of the bourgeoisie is distorted and rendered ultimately meaningless by class interest, the interest of the proletariat in its purely negative relationship with the bourgeoisie is true in a sense that transcends its particularity.³⁶ This is because (as Avineri points out) its particular perspective is identical with that of humanity as a unified whole. What the proletariat wills from this perspective – the positive constructions it will build when unfettered by the interests of others – is therefore valid in a way that has never been true of any previous revolutionary class. Its interest need not be ‘represented’ as the same as that of all the members of society; it truly is that of all members, considered from an eschatological point of view at the end of history.³⁷

So what does this suggest about the normative theory of revolutionary violence implicit in Marxism? The first part of the answer is that whatever the bourgeoisie with its individualist and rights-based conception of political ethics and legality has to say about the morality of violence is likely to be invalid since it reflects the particular class interests and therefore the perverted humanism of its proponents. The second part of the answer will be that whatever the proletariat and its political leaders have to say about violence – its justifications, its scope and its limitations – will be valid to the extent that it truly reflects the perspective of the last social class at its final, revolutionary stage of oppression and contributing to its dissemination and radicalization.³⁸ In the discussion that follows, this perspec-

tive is characterized in its fully realized form as ‘revolutionary subjectivity’. It offers a theory of the *legitimacy* of revolutionary violence in the sense that violence owes its validity to its origin in an authentic human perspective. While the idea of a dictatorship of the proletariat imagined by Marx and Engels (and later developed by Lenin in *The State and Revolution*) could be interpreted as reflecting quite directly the possibilities for commissioning violence implied in the first two pillars discussed above,³⁹ the possibilities of this third pillar for articulating a theory of violence are not fully articulated in the writings of Marx and Engels themselves. But it was this pillar, rather than the first two, which provided a basis for the theories of violence argued by Sorel and Fanon, criticized by Arendt and lately reprised by Žižek.

2. Violence and Revolutionary Subjectivity from Sorel to Žižek

In the writings of Sorel, Fanon and Žižek, two important stresses are added to the theory as it appears in the writings of Marx and Engels: first of all, they emphasize and radicalize the idea that the consciousness of the revolutionary class and, consequently, the consciousness of post-revolutionary humanity as a whole, will involve a break with contemporary, bourgeois values. Second, they see this form of consciousness as being achieved fully only at the end of a process of development within capitalism (or in Fanon’s case colonialism); only at the point of revolutionary rupture itself does it achieve complete realization. To echo the words of the *Communist Manifesto*, only at the actual point of revolution itself and not prior to that moment does the proletariat assume a form of subjectivity in which it really has ‘nothing to lose but [its] chains’.⁴⁰ If it still has something to lose, then it still has a possible particular interest and is therefore not purely proletarian and not yet truly revolutionary. An important issue for these thinkers, therefore, concerns the establishment of this *authentic* form of revolutionary subjectivity, a process that each of them addresses in part through a psychological framework.⁴¹ In all three cases, this results in two thoughts about revolutionary violence: first, that it may be *justified* by its contribution to the formation and dissemination of revolutionary subjectivity; and, second, that it is *legitimate* to the extent that it originates in this emergent form of consciousness. To the extent that the consciousness of the revolutionary class is understood to give rise to new values for a new order, this opens up the further possibility that whatever kinds of violence result from it are self-validating and not subject to the norms of existing conceptions of justice.

Violence and Moral Renewal in Sorel's *Reflections*

Proletarian violence, carried on as a pure and simple manifestation of the sentiment of class struggle, appears . . . as a very fine and heroic thing; it is at the service of the immemorial interests of civilization; it is not perhaps the most appropriate method of obtaining immediate material advantages, but it may save the world from barbarism.⁴²

In the classic Marxist narrative, communist revolution occurs at the end of a period of grinding exploitation and the worsening degradation of proletarians in a society increasingly polarized into two opposing classes. What if, instead of rallying imminent and successful proletarian revolution, the theoretical writings of communism had given an advance warning of impending disaster to the bourgeoisie and allowed it to pull back from the brink of total exploitation just in time? What if a compromise were reached between representatives of the two blocs? Would this not sap the proletariat of its energy and rob it of its revolution? This was a possibility that seemed to confront socialism by the first decade of the 20th century according to Georges Sorel. His *Reflections on Violence* (1908) was written as part of a polemic against parliamentary socialists who were forging, he believed, an unholy alliance with a pusillanimous bourgeoisie.⁴³ The 'captains of industry' in contemporary France had lost their heroic aggression and were haunted by the fear that their world would collapse in violent socialist revolution;⁴⁴ the socialists, concerned only with their own interests as a party and not those of the proletariat, were eager for power. They focused on occupying the state instead of liberating the proletarian producers in a society structured around industry. Parliamentary socialists manipulated the spectre of communism to stoke bourgeois fears and gain concessions in the interests of 'social peace'. 'Social peace', therefore, along with its socialist and bourgeois advocates, was the greatest danger to authentic proletarian revolution in Sorel's eyes, whereas violent 'class struggle' was the key to its success.

Social peace cast two shadows over the revolutionary prospects of the proletariat: on the one hand, there was a possibility that the revolution could be postponed, the energy sapped altogether from proletarian socialism. If social peace were successfully established, then the proletariat would cease to be revolutionary and the life of capitalism could appear to extend indefinitely. But Sorel believed that the pacific efforts of socialist 'diplomacy' and bourgeois cowardice were more likely, in fact, to prove counterproductive, failing in the long run. The compliance of workers in supporting the bourgeois order and their belief in the 'duty' of social cooperation depended on persuading them that resources were scarce and wage and working conditions determined by necessity. Concessions from the capitalists would demonstrate that the scarcity was in fact artificial and the idea of a social 'duty' a bourgeois fiction. Consequently, Sorel wrote, there was a 'recrudescence of the revolutionary spirit in a large section of the proletariat'.⁴⁵ But even if the first danger might prove unsustainable in the long run, a second remained: revolutions, Sorel argued following Tocqueville, manifested a 'con-

servative' element as the events following 1789 had demonstrated.⁴⁶ Aspects of the old order were always retained in the new and the nature of these residues could exercise a strong influence on the shape of things to come. Provided that proletarian revolution vanquished capitalism at the height of its success as the *Manifesto* predicted, then it would conserve its economic and moral dynamism, bringing it into a glorious communist future. If, however, the revolution were to take place at a time when bourgeois cowardice and socialist corruption had brought decadence to Europe, then only a decadent future society could be expected.

Whether faced with a decadent revolutionary future or a failure to achieve revolution at all, the politics of compromise needed to be short-circuited and this was what Sorel thought proletarian violence would achieve. Violence promised to address the problem on both of its fronts: it would revive the ailing bourgeoisie, jolting it back into a tragic-heroic role as the aggressive exploiting class doomed to destruction; and it would bring about the transformations in proletarian consciousness necessary for achieving a form of subjectivity capable of truly radical revolution. To the bourgeoisie, therefore, Sorel wrote:

To repay with *black ingratitude* the *benevolence* of those who wish to protect the workers, to meet with insults the homilies of the defenders of human fraternity and to respond by blows to the advance of the propagators of social peace: all that is assuredly not in conformity with the rules of [fashionable socialism], but it is a very practical way of indicating to the bourgeoisie that they must occupy themselves with their own affairs and that only.

The actions of the proletariat must be '*the brutal and clear expression of class struggle*' and quash any remaining hope that 'cleverness, social science or noble sentiments' could wind it down.⁴⁷

For the proletariat, therefore, the importance of violence was seen not simply in its direct, instrumental value, but in the transformation of revolutionary consciousness. First, it contributes to a radicalization of proletarian antagonism towards the capitalist order, leading to a catastrophic confrontation with the bourgeoisie; this is its negative aspect. Its positive aspect, second, is seen in Sorel's belief that the construction of a new communist order would originate in the creative spontaneity of an advanced proletarian consciousness entirely divorced from the old bourgeois order.⁴⁸ As Leszek Kolakowski emphasizes, Sorel took the most radical reading of Marxism possible in relation to the proletariat: for Sorel, proletarian consciousness constituted the basis for a complete break from established values, institutions and practices.⁴⁹ It was particularly in this respect that Sorel's reading of Nietzsche made itself felt: the idea of a 'transvaluation of all values' provided a way of imagining the creative role of workers in inventing the normative and institutional structures of the new order.⁵⁰ Anything contributing to the proletarian sense of separation and alienation from existing orders was therefore of benefit to the revolutionary struggle; anything tending towards compromise with the bourgeois world was inimical. In practical terms, Sorel envisaged small-scale proletarian violence that would help inspire the 'myth' of an eventual

cataclysmic confrontation. Myth is what occupies the consciousness of the revolutionary class and it is within the terms of this mythical consciousness that heroic, violent struggle against the 'force' of bourgeois authority is legitimated.⁵¹ This myth would animate a final revolution and the creation of a fundamentally new social and moral order. In a sense then, violence in the context of capitalism and revolution served the purpose of realizing a further, ultimate violent confrontation with capitalism: the end of violence was more violence.

For Sorel, revolution was essential to re-establishing lost virtues of heroism and selfless courage, not only for the proletariat but for European civilization as a whole: 'Not only can proletarian violence ensure the future revolution', he wrote, 'but it also seems the only means by which the European nations, stupefied by humanitarianism, can recover their former energy.'⁵² The primary purpose of violence, therefore, is not instrumental (in the sense of Sorel's statement that 'it is not . . . the most appropriate method of obtaining immediate material advantages'⁵³) but moral: it provokes hostility, it inspires, it educates and prompts further action. Violence thus moves from being a mere tactical instrument sometimes called upon to facilitate change to being a key element in the moral transformation of humanity. It becomes a means of tutoring and transforming revolutionary mankind and changing its consciousness;⁵⁴ and to the extent that violence is rooted in the consciousness of a genuinely revolutionary proletariat, it will be governed by the emerging revolutionary, heroic ethos mediated through myth that stands in stark contrast to the resentful and vengeful ethos of bourgeois and socialist politics.⁵⁵ Both the purpose and form of violence, therefore, were intimately tied to revolutionary, proletarian consciousness.

Sorel's influence was considerable during the early part of the 20th century, with both Georg Lukács and Walter Benjamin writing on the subject of revolutionary violence under the influence of his *Reflections*. Both philosophers saw the problem as one where the violence needed to overthrow the coercive institutions of an existing order (thus bringing to an end *all* coercive institutions) clashed directly with the demands of morality and legality. Lukács's essay 'Tactics and Ethics' (published in 1919) explores the moral demands of revolutionary actions in a variant of what was later called the problem of 'dirty hands'. He describes a predicament in which responsible revolutionaries are torn between the limits of an old, bourgeois ethics and the ethics of a future society which may or may not be about to emerge. He concludes that if revolutionaries must engage for tactical reasons in unethical acts like murder, they should not regard them as 'justified' even while they commit them out of necessity. Instead, they ought to be regarded as tragic choices. The values of the new order, however, whose foundations will become evident in the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat, must be presumed to legitimate ethically – as well as to justify tactically – such actions as may be necessary in their name; revolutionaries should therefore make their tactical decisions courageously.⁵⁶ Later, in *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács wrote that the internal hold of bourgeois 'life-forms' on the proletarian mind

could best be broken by resisting the distinction between ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ means, resolutely deploying both to meet the particular occasions of revolutionary struggle.⁵⁷ Similarly, Walter Benjamin’s ‘Critique of Violence’ (1921) seeks a means of escaping the categories of legality and illegality through revolution. He explores the problem of a ‘divine violence of pure means’ (he also calls it ‘revolutionary violence, the highest manifestation of unalloyed violence by man’⁵⁸) that must bring to an end the fateful cycle of ‘mythical violence’ whereby each coercive, legal order eventually crumbles in the face of the next comer. A final, purified revolutionary violence (which Benjamin explicitly relates to Sorel’s idea of the proletarian revolutionary strike) will expiate the cyclical violence of history, if necessary by killing in the name of ‘the just man’.⁵⁹ But, like the violence of authentic ‘revolutionary subjectivity’ in Žižek’s account to be discussed, genuinely divine, expiatory violence is difficult to distinguish from false starts.⁶⁰

Violence and Liberation in Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*

The rebel’s weapon is the proof of his humanity. For in the first days of the revolt you must kill: to shoot down a European is to kill two birds with one stone, to destroy an oppressor and the man he oppresses at the same time: there remain a dead man, and a free man; the survivor, for the first time, feels a *national* soil under his foot.⁶¹

The notion of violence being legitimated by its relationship with revolutionary consciousness is visible after the Second World War in Merleau-Ponty’s *Humanism and Terror*.⁶² But the most striking and influential deployment of a version of this idea in a theory of revolutionary violence is to be found in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) by Frantz Fanon. Although his work is marked by a wide range of reading and influence, Fanon can be interpreted as ‘a Marxist humanist’, as Nigel Gibson suggests, in that he championed ‘a notion of human potential “created by revolutionary beginnings”’.⁶³ Fanon’s text consists in part of an attempt to adapt the categories of Marxism to the relationship between the third and first worlds in the context of decolonization: in this project, Europe and its colonial classes as a whole take on the role of the bourgeoisie, while the peasantry of the colonies take on the mantle of the proletariat⁶⁴ and their roles in relation to ideological truth, the ethical validity of their actions and revolution are analogous.⁶⁵ The task Fanon assigned himself in *The Wretched of the Earth* was one of ‘political education’, helping the colonized to realize their revolutionary consciousness through violent confrontation with their oppressors, thus ‘awakening them, and allowing the birth of their intelligence’.⁶⁶

The emphasis Fanon places on the raw violence of the colonial relationship provides a basis for validating anti-colonial violence in three different ways (which mirror in part the three pillars of Marxism). First, and this is implied rather than stated, violence against the colonists is *just* because it enacts *just* retribution against European colonists whose violence is thus revenged.⁶⁷ Second, since there is an irrevocable dynamic to the dialectics of colonialism, decolonization is seen as

a necessary and natural phenomenon; and since violence is seen as an essential part of this dynamic, it is similarly neutralized as moral responsibility is displaced from the individual to a natural process. Finally, and this is where Fanon innovates using the third pillar, the violence of a native against the colonizer is presented as a necessary part of the preparation of true revolutionary subjectivity: it is, in fact, only through the *expression* of violence against an adequate object – the colonizer, rather than some surrogate victim – that colonial subjects shed the last remnants of colonialism and recreate themselves as the free subjects of a free nation. This last dimension of Fanon's justification for violence is central to the essay 'Concerning Violence' with which *The Wretched of the Earth* begins.

The idea of an emerging revolutionary consciousness is rooted in Fanon's interpretation of colonialism.⁶⁸ In the colonies themselves, the mystifications and mediations of capitalism are absent and the relationship between colonizer and native is one of pure and open violence. (Violence serves, as Sartre explains, the function of legitimizing colonialism by dehumanizing its subjects, making them seem deserving of imperial domination.⁶⁹) It is against this kind of rule that anti-colonial violence becomes an act of just revenge and a necessary, natural effect as well as, most importantly, an act through which colonial subjectivity overcomes and recreates itself as a renewed humanity. In Fanon's psychiatric evaluation, the first two elements are combined in the assumption that, when a person suffers physical violence, there is an unavoidable physiological impulse to act violently in return. Where this is suppressed – as it must be when confronted with the overwhelming threat of the colonial system – it must find another outlet. Violence which should properly be directed against the colonizers instead manifests itself first in mutual violence amongst the colonial subjects. Then it is projected through the delusions of communal superstition. Trapped physical energy thus expends itself in the horror of fraternal murder and the ecstasy of religious celebrations in which the burden of fear is transferred from the colonizers to a cluster of imaginary, supernatural enemies.⁷⁰

The crucial question for Fanon, then, was when would the colonized decide to bring to an end this futility and the distorted form of consciousness from which it arose and assert their energies against colonialism? This, we may say, is the question of when the natives achieve revolutionary subjectivity,⁷¹ i.e. when they go beyond the psychology and ideological contortions of *being colonial subjects* and begin the process of constructing themselves as *free subjects*. It is in this transformation that violence becomes an essential part of revolution: it is a transformation that goes beyond merely the formal transfer of power from the metropolis to a native administration, and requires an integral metamorphosis of individual subject, national consciousness and power politics. The third phase of violence (in which, as Sartre wrote, the natives 'take heart and kill their oppressors') brings to an end the violence of the first two since it takes away the illness of which they were the symptoms: the impulse of revenge is expressed adequately only in revolutionary violence. This process, as Fanon writes, 'is the veritable creation of new

men', in which 'the "thing" which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself'.⁷²

Sartre's prefatory gloss on *The Wretched of the Earth* underlines the ideological dimensions of Fanon's analysis, making the idea of class consciousness in the colonial context work in favour of a maximally permissive doctrine of revolutionary violence. In particular, his account rejects the validity of European views that would seek to regulate or criticize anti-colonial violence since they constitute an ideological fig leaf for colonial interests. From a true humanist perspective – something approximating to that of humanity as a whole, looking at history from the vantage point of its end – any view which fails to perceive humanity under the aspect of totality is dismissed as inadequate, both epistemologically and morally. By virtue of its historical and economic relationship with those other parts of humanity it has colonized, Europe is locked into a one-sided perspective of this kind. It has two consequences for Europeans: first of all, they can say nothing that has any meaning beyond their own culture about the morality of violence as it confronts them in the colonies; second, their claim to immunity from such violence as noncombatants is denied on the basis of collective guilt. All have benefited in the culture that has grown in a parasitic and violently oppressive relationship with the colonies; none, therefore, can claim innocence.⁷³

The ideological dimension of Marxism thus becomes the basis for a theory of political violence tending towards radical permissiveness: as Sartre says, '[o]nce begun, [decolonization] is a war that gives no quarter'.⁷⁴ It permits the argument that any perspective that could condemn the 'barbarism' of anti-colonial violence is invalid from the start, disarming criticism in the first place; and since the colonized nation is given a role analogous to that of the proletariat in Marx and Engels's narrative, anything it thinks and anything it chooses to do, the values and structures it chooses to create (and this includes the ethical boundaries it chooses to define) may be presumed valid. In the crystallization of revolutionary subjectivity, the view of the decolonizers approximates to that of a humanity reunified after the violent separations of colonialism. Its violence, therefore, is valid in a way that is morally unassailable and that can be limited by no other human force.

Like Sorel, Fanon treats violence, not primarily as an instrument that may justifiably be used to overcome resistance, but as the means by which an adequate spiritual and psychological state can be achieved in the minds of the revolutionaries. In this view, 'revolution' stops being essentially about the transfer of power from one political group to another or even about the transformation of social structures. It becomes more importantly a matter of achieving true humanity through the moral reconstruction of the subject. Violence is *part of* the process of revolution, not merely an instrument that can be used to create circumstances in which it may happen. Whereas, in an Arendtian view, violence cannot be part of the essence of revolution because revolution can be imagined without it, by contrast, Sorel, Fanon and Sartre imply that violence would be necessary even were resistance to fall away and the ruling class to capitulate peacefully.

Žižek's Redemptive Violence

If Sorel transformed the third category of Marxian violence under the influence of Nietzsche's transvaluation, and Fanon did so under the influence of a Freudian concept of repression, Žižek's recent revival of the idea of 'redemptive violence' does so using the Lacanian notion of the 'symptom'.⁷⁵ In *Gates of Revolution*, Žižek's aim is to retrieve from the Marxist left of the 20th century a workable revolutionary moment through which the contemporary left can revive some of the energy it lost during the 1990s. To this end, he returns to the revolutionary decisions of Lenin and tries to distinguish authentic revolutionary impulses from the perversions of Stalinism. In Lenin's decision to seize the moment and act to overthrow Kerensky's Provisional Government in October 1917, Žižek discovers what he takes to be a form of violence legitimated by its authentic relationship with revolutionary subjectivity. His discussion of the Leninist moment, however, ranges widely across current cultural and literary texts as he seeks to elucidate the idea of a 'redemptive violence' of the contemporary left.

Žižek takes as his starting point the idea of a violence inflicted by the victim against the victim himself drawing, characteristically, on its dramatic realization in popular entertainment, namely in the film *Fight Club*. In a scene from the film, the hero, Jack, assaults himself in front of his employer in an office, out of sight of anyone else.⁷⁶ In terms of the attainment of 'revolutionary subjectivity', the character's move is progressive because it overcomes what Žižek takes to be his 'libidinal' investment in the relationship of domination. The effectiveness of the master's rule, it is assumed, is based on the subject's masochistic desire to be ruled. By attacking his own person, Jack dominates himself violently, rendering the master superfluous. The subject thereby proletarianizes himself, degrading himself to the point where he can *experience* and the master can *do* no worse. The violence implicit in the master's role is thus rendered impotent.

The logic of Jack's actions illustrates for Žižek what is 'ultimately at stake in revolutionary violence', namely, 'the transformation of the oppressed victim into an active agent, captured by Marx's famous statement that the emancipation of the proletariat can only be the act of the proletariat itself'.⁷⁷ How can the proletariat be brought to the point of true revolutionary action? Žižek distinguishes, following Heidegger, between a 'substituting-dominating solicitude' and an 'anticipatory-liberating solicitude'. By intervening to 'help' the subject, the former lacks genuine 'care' for the subject's need to learn how to care for itself; solicitude is exercised as a potential form of self-assertion and may even serve to prevent learning and liberation. This is analogous to the 'social peace' offered to the proletariat by parliamentary socialists in Sorel's account: by offering short-term, partial relief, it takes away the means by which true liberation may ultimately be achieved, i.e. the violent impulse to rebel. An 'anticipatory-liberating solicitude', by contrast, is one which helps oppressed subjects to help themselves, leading to autonomous liberation.

What would such an attitude be like? Like Sorel, Žižek believes it necessary to radicalize polarity, hence the need for violence: violence by the oppressor, paradoxically, is better than charity because it openly confesses itself and compels the oppressed to confront themselves in the reality of their situation; violence, too, against the state by the subject is good because it provokes the confrontation. All in all, both contribute to the attainment of revolutionary subjectivity, i.e. an attitude tending towards true liberation. By contrast, altruistic acts from those in power, like charity, 'help' or welfare, tend to reinforce domination by reducing the polar tension, increasing dependency and thus reducing the impulse towards true freedom.

Žižek tries to define a form of subjectivity by which truly *revolutionary* violence could confront the inauthentic, excessive and illegitimate violence of the state. (This would go beyond the limited steps of Jack in *Fight Club*.) In this endeavour, he rehearses the quest of both Sorel and, under his immediate influence, Walter Benjamin, both of whom tried to imagine a form of revolutionary violence that would break the spell that compels each creation of a new order to establish a new form of forceful domination. The danger (in Gilles Deleuze's terminology) is in, on the one hand, the shift to complete 'de-territorialization' (i.e. generalized, purposeless violence), and, on the other, to complete 're-territorialization', i.e. founding a new, fascistic, state-like violent order. A *via media* is needed.⁷⁸ Like Benjamin, Žižek takes the view that there can be no advanced criterion to distinguish between the two, such as success (Merleau-Ponty's criterion) or an 'abstract-universal norm'.⁷⁹ Instead, he confronts the impossible question of differentiating 'false' outbursts of violence (mere 'symptoms' analogous to the fratricides of Fanon's colonial subjects) from the 'miracle' of an 'authentic revolutionary breakthrough'. In Žižek's account, the only criterion for distinguishing authentic from inauthentic revolutionary violence is what he calls 'the absolutely inherent one: that of the enacted utopia':

In a genuine revolutionary breakthrough, the utopian future is neither simply fully realized, present, nor simply evoked as a distant promise which justifies present violence – it is rather as if, in a unique suspension of temporality, in the short circuit between the present and future, we are – as if by Grace – briefly allowed to act as if the utopian future is (not yet fully here but) already at hand, there to be seized. Revolution is experienced not as a hardship over which the future happiness and freedom already cast their shadow – in it, we are already free even as we fight for freedom; we are already happy even as we fight for happiness, no matter how difficult the circumstances. Revolution is not a Merleau-Pontyan wager, an act suspended in the *future antérieur*, to be legitimised or de-legitimised by the long-term outcome of present acts; it is, as it were, *its own ontological proof*, an immediate index of its own truth.⁸⁰

By way of illustration, Žižek contrasts the re-enactment of the storming of the Winter Palace in Petrograd in 1920 (by real participants who were at that time also fighting the civil war just outside the city) and the First of May parades as indicating the difference between Leninism and Stalinism: 'if we need proof of

how Leninism functioned in an entirely different way', he asks, 'are not such performances the supreme proof that the October Revolution was definitely *not* simply a *coup d'état* by a small group of Bolsheviks but an event which unleashed a tremendous emancipatory potential?'⁸¹ It seems, in summary, that the spontaneity of a mass revolutionary movement, including and especially its violent expression, is the mark of its own authenticity.⁸² Pointedly echoing the words of Robespierre, Žižek writes that to criticize such violence (even the terror of Leninism, though not perhaps of Stalinism) betrays a 'pious desire' to have a 'revolution without revolution'.⁸³ Spontaneous, liberating violence, it seems, is definitive of an authentically emancipatory revolution; and in the absence of any independent criteria, recognition of its legitimacy must rest on our trust in the good faith of the revolutionaries themselves.⁸⁴ Thus, Žižek follows the third strand of Marxism in perhaps the most decisive way of all those we have seen in his apparent decision that the authenticity of revolutionary consciousness can be appreciated only from within revolutionary subjectivity itself. No criterion independent of that perspective can be presented to those not actually participating in its 'enacted utopia' of anti-authoritarian violence.⁸⁵ Once again, therefore, violence is validated in the context of a spontaneous revolutionary consciousness that creates its own values, actions and limitations, and there is no other perspective that can impose limits on it.

3. Revolutionary Theory and Terrorism

Permissiveness

... the 'special repressive force' for the suppression of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie, of millions of labouring people by a handful or two of the wealthy, must be replaced by a 'special repressive force' for the suppression of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat (the dictatorship of the proletariat).⁸⁶

Before concluding, I want to discuss what was once called 'the communist problem': the problem of revolutionary violence as practised by activists drawing their ideas from Marxism. Since the Russian revolution of 1917, it has been identified particularly with the commission of violence in the name of a dictatorship of the proletariat envisaged, following Lenin as well as Marx, as the temporary takeover of the bourgeois state as a means of dismantling capitalism. It is therefore associated in its radical forms with the revolutionary terror of government rather than with the terrorism of non-state insurrectionary groups. The assumption upon which it rests is reflected in Lenin's pronouncement in *The State and Revolution* that '[t]he replacement of the bourgeois state by the proletarian state is impossible without a violent revolution'.⁸⁷ This idea remains central to evaluations of Marxism as a doctrine of political praxis as historians continue to investigate the numbers who died as a result of Stalinism and to analyse the relationship between theory and practice in the government of actually existing socialist societies.⁸⁸

This is, however, only the first way in which Marxist theory is related to violent excess though, if we assume a meaningful relationship between Marxist theory and communist practices in government, then we can say that the idea of a dictatorship of the proletariat has probably produced the largest body count historically. (The excesses of Stalinism during the 1930s particularly need hardly be rehearsed but a statistic of 700,000 persons executed by the communist leadership during 1937 and 1938 may suffice as a general illustration.⁸⁹) The weakness of Marxism as a theory of revolutionary violence in this regard is that it lays down no clear limits to the kinds of violence available to dictatorship. This establishes the outer dimension of its role as a *permissive doctrine*, i.e. a philosophical framework within which the possibility of using violence is validated but without setting any clear limits to how much violence can be used and against whom.

The second kind of theory, leaning on pillar 3, is concerned with a different stage of revolution and therefore presents different normative problems. It is now possible to clarify the dangers in this kind of theory to which Arendt referred in 1969. In general, it is concerned, not with how a political revolution that has already occurred can subsequently achieve a social revolution (as was the case in Russia after 1917), but with how a political revolution can be initiated against the state in the first place. A propensity for excess, therefore, would tend, at least initially, towards revolutionary terrorism, i.e. a use of indiscriminate violence by non-state organisations seeking to achieve conditions suitable for revolution. There are two distinguishing features in particular which have a terroristic tendency in this sense: first of all, the Sorelian idea that violence can play a pedagogic role in educating and disseminating revolutionary consciousness tends to support the use of violence, not as a way to overcome obstacles standing in the way of a democratic will to political power, but to achieve a democratic will that does not yet exist. In line with this notion, Sorel, Fanon and Žižek all give space to a form of *la politique du pire*⁹⁰ which sees any violence perpetrated between capitalism or colonialism and its subjects as advantageous since it will provoke a desire for revolution. Any tendency towards compromise or peace will correspondingly be seen as dangerous. Provocation, class conflict and polarization within society are seen as desirable however they may come about and the three theorists regard violence as essential to creating these conditions. For Sorel, this entails deliberate and violent provocation of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat with the intention of seeing this violence return upon the oppressed in the form of intensified exploitation. Fanon, writing *in medias res* during the struggle of the Front de Libération Nationale against French occupation, saw this as having already come about in Algeria through the naked violence of the colonial relationship. Žižek gestures towards both a masochistic approach whereby the violence of capitalism is called down upon the subject and one of provocation where violence is launched against the social order.⁹¹ In all of these, violence is seen, not as an instrument used to achieve immediate tactical ends, but instead as an essential part of the revolution itself.

390 The second distinctive characteristic of this kind of theory is that it supposes

that through radical alienation from bourgeois (in Fanon's case, European) culture and ideology, the consciousness of the revolutionary class is rendered capable of creating new values for a new social order. This constitutes something of a blank cheque for the commission of violence. Sorel's catastrophic final battle takes place in the context of a proletarian transvaluation of all values. Lukács and Benjamin both rely on the final revolution to generate a future whose values will vindicate retrospectively the commission of murders perpetrated in its name. Fanon's colonial subjects view revolutionary praxis through a Manichean opposition in which '[t]ruth is that which hurries on the break-up of the colonialist regime [and] promotes the emergence of the nation; it is all that protects the natives, and ruins the foreigners . . . and the good is quite simply that which is evil for them'.⁹² Žižek, finally, sees the authenticity of revolutionary subjectivity as something which cannot be judged by any external standards but which is, instead, somehow independently self-evident. The ideological views and practical impulses of the revolutionary class, including its violence, are validated in all three cases while all other perspectives are regarded as incapable of meaningful criticism.

As a result of both features, the great danger of the second kind of theory is that it therefore presents no limits to violence legitimized by its origins in the consciousness of the revolutionary class and justified by its relation to the ends of revolution. This means, in effect, that anything the proletariat (or its political leadership) decides to do as part of its struggle – however violent and indiscriminate it may appear – is validated in advance.

Conclusion

The three pillars initially outlined therefore present considerable dangers in the context of revolutionary action. The norms of permissible violence in revolutionary theory, as the foregoing analysis shows, suffer from the problem identified more generally in Marxist thought by Steven Lukes: it has, he writes, 'from its beginning exhibited a certain approach to moral questions that has disabled it from offering moral resistance to measures taken in its name'.⁹³ To continue using the language of just war theory, we may say that the danger lies with respect to all three pillars in the failure to establish clear lines of engagement in terms of *jus in bello*. That is, while violence is validated as a means in general, no criterion is clearly stated that can differentiate between particular kinds and degrees of violence.⁹⁴ The idea that violence may be justified by just ends is inherently prone to excess since it is completely without a limiting principle such that great aspirations may be used to justify great crimes; and both historical 'necessity' and the 'revolutionary subjectivity' of the proletariat tend towards the negation of any accepted limits on permissible violence. The first does so by arguing that the rules may excusably be broken where necessary, and the second by subverting the rules themselves, suggesting that new rules may be put in their place based exclusively on the interests of one of the contending parties.

In the final analysis, the problematic nature of these dimensions to revolutionary theory concerns the way they lend themselves to deployment by real political actors. The danger is twofold. On the one hand, they are susceptible to deployment by cynics citing them to validate indiscriminate and disproportionate uses of force. On the other, they have the capacity to shape the thinking of radicals more directly by encouraging revolutionary groups to imagine that whatever they believe to be the right actions must *actually* be right by virtue of the assumption that they originated in their 'revolutionary subjectivity'. This would give rise to a form of self-consciousness similar in form to the 'enthusiasm' of the early modern puritan zealots once analysed by David Hume. These fanatics believed that since they were elected by God and since the Holy Spirit acted through them, their desires, their hatreds and their motives must be pure and righteous *ipso facto*.⁹⁵ However much their political actions seemed to contradict the rules of ordinary morality, therefore, they were validated nonetheless by their putative origins. The theology of Calvinism (as well as that of Islam, among other religions), Hume believed, was such that it lent itself to deployments of this kind. I would suggest that any view of revolution that presents the revolutionary class as a messianic 'elect' whose impulses are right by virtue of its historical mission while those of others are, by the same reasoning, wrong, may give rise to a similar way of thinking: as Žižek says, redemptive violence acts 'as if by Grace'.

What these theories appear to need is a limiting principle but this would seem to be precisely what Marxian theories of ideology reject, that is, a conception of human rights or some similarly universalist absolute that can contradict and set a limit to the actions committed in the name of the revolutionary class. There is, however, one suggestion that could provide the starting point for a conception that would marry the Marxist commitment to the historically concrete to a principled limit to revolutionary violence: writing on 'Ethics and Revolution', Marcuse argued that the actions perpetrated by revolutionaries should never be such as would contradict the ends of the revolution itself; that is, they should never be so inhumane as to outweigh the humanitarian goals of the revolutionaries.⁹⁶ This argument resembles in its general form Michael Walzer's account of why even just wars are restrained by certain absolute principles and cannot permit indiscriminate actions merely by stating that 'war is hell' and should therefore be expedited by whatever means necessary.⁹⁷ Since violent revolutions, as Arendt suggested, can be hell too, perhaps an argument of this kind might be used to outline a set of principles limiting the scope of violence committed in the name of liberation in the context of a theory of communist (or post-colonial) justice. This would require that the principles of justice implied by a revolutionary subjectivity be articulated in advance. Whether or not this is possible, however, it is absent from Marxian theories of revolutionary violence. Unless it is spelled out systematically, we are thrown back onto an implicit faith in the honourable intentions and goodwill of the revolutionaries.

Notes

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1. Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, quoted in V.I. Lenin (1992) *The State and Revolution*, tr. Robert Service, p. 19. London: Penguin.
2. Arendt (1990) *On Revolution*. London: Penguin; originally 1963. Arendt (1970) *On Violence*. Harmondsworth: Penguin; originally 1969.
3. Arendt (1990, in n. 2), pp. 15 and 17–20.
4. Arendt (1970, in n. 2), pp. 11–13 and 65.
5. Slavoj Žižek (2002a) *Revolution at the Gates: Žižek on Lenin, the 1917 Writings*. London: Verso. (2002b) *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism? Four Interventions in the (Mis)Use of a Notion*. London: Verso.
6. Ted Honderich (2003) *Terrorism for Humanity: Inquiries in Political Philosophy*. London: Pluto Press.
7. Its importance is stressed in John Keane (1996) 'The Long Century of Violence', in *Reflections on Violence*. London: Verso.
8. Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, in David McLellan (ed.) (1977) *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, p. 215. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
9. Marx (1872) 'Speech in Amsterdam', in McLellan (n. 8), pp. 594–5. On the socioeconomic context of this expectation, see Michael Levin (1998) "'The Hungry Forties": The Socio-Economic Context of the *Communist Manifesto*', in Mark Cowling (ed.) *The Communist Manifesto: New Interpretations*, pp. 41–2. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
10. Though see Arendt (1970, in n. 2), appendix 1.
11. Arendt (1970, in n. 2), pp. 51–2.
12. Michael Walzer (1973) 'Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2: 160–80, p. 170.
13. Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', in Marx (1975) *Early Writings*, ed. Lucio Colletti, pp. 328–9. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
14. Though Marx's commitment to moral equality has been questioned by Allen Wood in (1979) 'Marx on Right and Justice', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 8: 267–95, p. 281, cited in Will Kymlicka (2002) *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction*, p. 169, and rebutted, pp. 169–70. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
15. Marx and Engels (2002) *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. Gareth Stedman Jones, p. 244. London: Penguin.
16. Levin (n. 9), p. 45.
17. Marx asks whether 'with the savage warfare of Versailles outside . . . the Commune [would] not have shamefully betrayed its trust by affecting to keep up all the decencies and appearances of liberalism as in a time of profound peace?' In Karl Marx (1974) *Political Writings*, vol. 3, *The First International and After*, ed. David Fernbach, p. 218. Harmondsworth: Penguin. On the terrorism of class rule in France, *ibid.* pp. 207–8.
18. On Marx's changing views on the dictatorship of the proletariat, see David Fernbach,

- introduction to Marx (n. 17), pp. 37–8. Marx, ‘First Draft of “The Civil War in France”’, *ibid.* p. 249. *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875), *ibid.* p. 355. On the arming of the proletariat, see the ‘Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League’ (March 1850), in Marx (1973) *Political Writings*, vol. 1, *The Revolutions of 1848*, ed. David Fernbach, p. 326. Harmondsworth: Penguin. On revolutionary terror as ‘counter-violence’ against the resistance of oppressors, see Herbert Marcuse, ‘Ethics and Revolution’, reprinted in (1971a) *Revolution and the Rule of Law*, ed. Edward Kent, pp. 49–50. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. See also Marcuse (1971b) *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis*, p. 95. Harmondsworth: Pelican.
19. John Harris (1974) ‘The Marxist Conception of Violence’, *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 3: 192–220. See, in particular, Engels cited on pp. 194–5.
 20. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1969) *Humanism and Terror*, e.g. pp. xviii–xix. Boston: Beacon Press. John Sommerville (1971) ‘Violence, Politics, and Morality’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 32: 241–9, p. 242. See also Walzer (n. 12), p. 172, n. 16.
 21. Marcuse (1971a, in n. 18), pp. 54–6.
 22. *Ibid.* e.g. p. 52 *et passim* and Norberto Bobbio (1988) *Which Socialism? Marxism, Socialism, and Democracy*, tr. R. Griffin, p. 166. Cambridge: Polity Press.
 23. For the views of some later Marxists, see Robert Service (2000) *Lenin*, pp. 177–8 and 364–5. London: Macmillan. Leon Trotsky (1961) *Terrorism and Communism*, p. 58. Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press; originally 1920. Leon Trotsky (1938) ‘Their Morals and ours’, originally published in *The New Internationalist* 4 (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1938/1938-mor.htm>). Igor Primoratz (1997) ‘The Morality of Terrorism’, *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 14(3): 221–33, pp. 225–7.
 24. This is the story of chapter 1 of *The Communist Manifesto*.
 25. See, for instance, ‘Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: Introduction’, in Marx (1975, in n. 13), pp. 253–4.
 26. For the idea of necessity in just war theory, see Walzer (2002) *Just and Unjust Wars*, 3rd edn. New York: Basic Books.
 27. Richard Overy (2005) *The Dictators: Hitler’s Germany, Stalin’s Russia*, pp. 266–9. London: Penguin. Merleau-Ponty (n. 20), *passim*.
 28. See Louis Althusser (1969) *For Marx*, pp. 221–2, n. 1. London: Verso. Against Althusser’s view that Marx abandoned the earlier perspective, see Leszek Kolakowski (1981) *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. 1, *The Founders*, pp. 173–4. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Daniel Brudney (1998) *Marx’s Attempt to Leave Philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. In any case, it remained available for later theorists as a way of construing and deploying Marxist theory.
 29. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1965) *The German Ideology*, p. 62. London: Lawrence & Wishart. ‘Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: Introduction’, in Marx (n. 13), p. 254. See also Schlomo Avineri (1968) *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, pp. 58–9. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 30. Georg Lukács (1990) ‘Legality and Illegality’, in *History and Class Consciousness*, tr. R. Livingstone, p. 258. London: Merlin Press.
 31. See, for example, ‘On the Jewish Question’, in Marx (n. 13), pp. 229–32.
 32. Kolakowski (n. 28), p. 176.
 33. Avineri (n. 29), p. 140.
 34. Marx and Engels (1965, in n. 29), pp. 86–7.
 35. ‘Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: Introduction’, in Marx (n. 13), p. 256.
 36. On the relationship between revolutionary theory and the ‘transcendence of the proletariat’, *ibid.* p. 257.

37. On differences between the ideological narrative of proletarian revolution and earlier revolutions see *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in McLellan (n. 8), p. 302.
38. Merleau-Ponty reflects something of this idea when he writes that 'a revolution does not define crimes according to the established law but in accordance with the law of the society it wishes to create' (n. 20), p. xxxii.
39. See n. 18 on the dictatorship of the proletariat.
40. Marx and Engels (n. 15), p. 258.
41. Each was influenced in important ways by psychological theory: Sorel by Henri Bergson, Fanon and Žižek by psychoanalysis.
42. G. Sorel (1999) *Reflections on Violence*, ed. Jeremy Jennings, p. 85. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
43. For a comprehensive account of Sorel's ideas and their background, see Jeremy Jennings (1985) *Georges Sorel: The Character and Development of his Thought*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. Also Isaiah Berlin (1997) 'Georges Sorel', in Henry Hardy (ed.) *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, pp. 296–332. London: Pimlico.
44. On the heroic credentials of the modern bourgeoisie, see Sorel (n. 42), p. 75.
45. *Ibid.* p. 54.
46. *Ibid.* p. 81.
47. *Ibid.* p. 77.
48. Sorel's idea was to cultivate the 'juridical conscience' of the workers as a basis for the new morality. See Jennings (1990) *Syndicalism in France: A Study of Ideas*, p. 58. Basingstoke: Macmillan. On the continuity of Sorel's outlook through various phases of his work, see Jennings (n. 43), p. 179.
49. See Leszek Kolakowski (1982) *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. 2, *The Golden Age*, pp. 162–3. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Sorel (n. 42), pp. 153–4.
50. Though for qualifications to this view, see John L. Stanley (1976) *From Georges Sorel: Essays in Socialism and Philosophy*, p. 3. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
51. Sorel believed this would give rise to a noble and limited form of violence, trusting in the moral restraint of the revolutionaries. See Sorel (n. 42), pp. 105–6. On the relationship of Sorel's conception of the myth of the general strike to Marx's notion of proletarian ideology, see Stanley (n. 50), pp. 43–5.
52. Sorel (n. 42), p. 78.
53. *Ibid.* p. 85. See also Jennings (n. 48), p. 57.
54. The idea that revolution is necessary to transform the consciousness of the proletariat is suggested in *The German Ideology* (p. 87) where Marx and Engels write that the class overthrowing the social order, 'can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew'.
55. Sorel (n. 42), pp. 105–6 and 159–61. Jennings (n. 48), pp. 67–8.
56. Georg Lukács (1972) 'Tactics and Ethics', in *Political Writings, 1919–1929: The Question of Parliamentaryism and Other Essays*, ed. R. Livingston, tr. M. McColgan, pp. 10–11. London: NLB. See also Tom Denyer (1989) 'The Ethics of Struggle', *Political Theory* 17: 535–49. Denyer asserts that Lukács saw violence as justified in terms of a goal of 'realizing value'.
57. Lukács (n. 30), p. 264.
58. Benjamin (2004) 'Critique of Violence', *Selected Writings*, vol. 1.: 1913–1926, p. 252. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
59. *Ibid.* p. 251.
60. *Ibid.* p. 252.
61. Sartre, Preface to Frantz Fanon (1980) *The Wretched of the Earth*, tr. C. Farrington. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

62. See, for instance, Merleau-Ponty (n. 20), pp. 13 and 15 on humanism, violence and the spontaneity of the masses.
63. Nigel Gibson (2003) *Frantz Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination*, p. 186. Cambridge: Polity. As David Macey stresses, however, Fanon's appropriation of 'a more conventional Marxism' was only partial and his thinking on revolutionary confrontations in the colonial context were strongly shaped by his readings of Sartrean Marxism, particularly in Sartre's *Critique de la raison dialectique*. For a helpful analysis of Fanon's adaptation of Marxist social categories to suit a colonial situation in which the peasantry rather than the proletariat carry the revolutionary torch, see Macey (2000) *Frantz Fanon: A Life*, pp. 478–88. London: Granta. On the treatment of ideology in Fanon's 'revolutionary humanism', see also Paul Nursey-Bray (1980) 'Race and Nation: Ideology in the Thought of Frantz Fanon', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 18: 135–42.
64. Fanon (n. 61), pp. 30–1.
65. *Ibid.* pp. 34–7.
66. *Ibid.* p. 197, quoted in Gibson (n. 63), p. 186.
67. See, for example, in Sartre, Preface to Fanon (n. 61), pp. 17–18. As David Macey (n. 63), p. 478, puts it, anti-colonial actions constitute 'counter-violence' (the term used by Marcuse in the context of revolutionary violence in (1971a, in n. 18), pp. 49–50).
68. Fanon (n. 61), p. 29.
69. Sartre, Preface, *ibid.* p. 13.
70. *Ibid.* pp. 42–3.
71. On the Marxian nature of Fanon's treatment of the revolutionary consciousness of the colonized, see Lou Turner (1996) 'The Hegelian and Fanonian Dialectic', in Lewis R. Gordon, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting and Renée T. White (eds) *Fanon: a Critical Reader*, p. 138. Oxford: Blackwell.
72. Fanon (n. 61), p. 28.
73. 'With us', Sartre writes, 'to be a man is to be an accomplice of colonialism, since all of us without exception have profited by colonial exploitation.' Sartre, Preface, *ibid.* p. 21.
74. Sartre, *ibid.* p. 18.
75. Žižek (n. 5), p. 259.
76. *Ibid.* pp. 251–2.
77. *Ibid.* p. 255.
78. *Ibid.* pp. 257–9.
79. Benjamin (n. 58), pp. 251–2. Žižek (n. 5), p. 259.
80. Žižek (n. 5), pp. 259–60.
81. *Ibid.* p. 260. Sarah Kay characterizes the Leninist moment invoked by Žižek as his realization that political action could not be effected without 'the terrorism that characterizes every authentic ethical stance'. (2003) *Žižek: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
82. On the 'terroristic' and 'revolutionary' nature of political 'acts' and their Lacanian roots, see Kay (n. 80), pp. 152–6. Žižek exhorts readers to search for the 'good terror' which can constitute an authentic political act: (2000) *The Ticklish Subject: Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. London: Verso. Cited in Kay (2003), p. 153.
83. Žižek (n. 5), pp. 8 and 261.
84. On the problematic nature of the requirement that an authentic 'act' be recognizable and yet stand outside available normative frameworks, see Kay (n. 81), p. 153.
85. Although Žižek's illustrations do seem to depend in some implicit way on an assumption that their validity is independently self-evident.
86. Lenin (n. 1), p. 18.
87. *Ibid.* pp. 20–1. See also Nicholai Bukharin and Evgenii Preobrazhensky (1969) *The ABC*

- of *Communism*, ed. E.H. Carr, I. III. 23, pp. 124–5. Harmondsworth: Pelican; first published in 1918.
88. See, for instance, Overy (n. 27), pp. 193–6, on deaths as a result of repression under Stalin and ch. 7 on the role of ideology in the regime.
89. Ibid. p. 68.
90. See Michael Ignatieff (2004) *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror*, pp. 61–70. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Something similar seems to be implied by Lukács (n. 30), p. 265.
91. Kay's characterization shows clearly the resemblance to the politics of the worst: 'The choice, as [Žižek] repeatedly says, is between bad and worse; worse is better if good will follow' (n. 81), p. 154.
92. Fanon (n. 61), p. 39.
93. Steven Lukes (1985) *Marxism and Morality*, p. 141. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
94. Leon Trotsky accepts a consequence of this kind (1938, in n. 23).
95. David Hume, 'Of Superstition and Enthusiasm', in (1985) *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.
96. Marcuse (1971a, in n. 18), pp. 53, 57–9.
97. On Walzer's view and others, see James Turner Johnson (1999) *Morality and Contemporary Warfare*, ch. 4. New Haven: Yale University Press.