

The Logic of Violence. Walter Benjamin's Cardinal Antagonisms*

Federico Rodríguez
Universidad de Sevilla
frogo@us.es



© the author

Abstract

These pages take a fresh look at some of the irreducible complexities of the philosophical problem of violence (its theological-political delimitation and eventual use), on the occasion of Peter Fenves and Julia Ng's recent English critical edition of Walter Benjamin's classic essay *Toward the Critique of Violence* (1921), published on the centenary of the original German text. Starting from this eminently philological context, we would like to show how, in this essay, the true and antagonistic intimacy between so-called "non-violence" (a politics of pure means) and the "doctrine of non-action" (a Taoist reversal of Kantian morality) is determined through a logical critique of pacifism (as dogmatic, contradictory, metaphysical, "a more remote theorem"). Benjamin's critique is also crystallized through an exceptional and profound reading of the divine commandment of the Torah: "Thou shalt not kill" (*Ex* 20, 13).

Keywords: action; self-defense; contradiction; murder; heart; justice; responsibility; pacifism; nothing; anarchism

Resum. Lògica de la violència. Els antagonismes cardinals de Walter Benjamin

Aquestes pàgines aborden novament algunes de les complexitats irreductibles del problema filosòfic de la violència (la seva delimitació teologicopolítica i el seu eventual ús), aprofitant la recent edició crítica en anglès de Peter Fenves i Julia Ng del clàssic assaig de Walter Benjamin *Zur Kritik der Gewalt* (Cap a la crítica de la violència) (1921), publicada en el centenari del text original alemany. Partint d'aquest context eminentment filològic, ens agradaria mostrar com, en aquest assaig, la veritable i antagonica intimitat entre

* An abridged version of this text was presented on 4 November 2021 at "Conversation on Walter Benjamin's *Toward the Critique of Violence*", organized by the Instituto de Filosofía of the Universidad Diego Portales and the Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, Chile. Both editors of the critical English edition of *Toward the Critique of Violence* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2021), Peter Fenves and Julia Ng, were present for the conversation. I thank them for their thoughtful comments. Beyond the English version of the German essay, Ng's scholarly translation presents a rich apparatus of notes. The text is accompanied by twenty-one key fragments from Benjamin, translated and annotated by Fenves, and also by the translation and presentation (by other guest scholars) of several satellite texts from those years that the author would have considered in the process of writing. The book also includes a bibliography that was composed by Benjamin.

l'anomenada «no-violència» (una política de purs mitjans) i la «doctrina de la no-acció» (una inversió taoista de la moral kantiana) es determina a través d'una crítica lògica del pacifisme (com a dogmàtic, contradictori, metafísic, «un teorema més remot»). La crítica de Benjamin també es cristal·litza a través d'una lectura excepcional i abissal del manament diví de la Torà: «No mataràs» (Ex 20, 13).

Paraules clau: acció; autodefensa; contradicció; assassinat; cor; justícia; responsabilitat; pacifisme; no-res; anarquisme

“The critique of violence [...] would express itself as a manifesto in favor of total nonviolence”, writes Peter Fenves in his “Introduction” (2021: 28) to the recent and brilliant critical edition of Walter Benjamin’s “Toward the Critique of Violence”. This sentence is *cardinally* true. The term “manifesto” reminds us not only of *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, but also of the proliferation of these kinds of statements in the artistic avant-garde (*Surrealism in the Service of the Revolution*, 1930-33), which the philosopher knew very well (see 1929). Of course, the path from the “manifesto” to the “manifestation” is never obvious: sometimes the manifesto impedes the splendor of manifestation, provoking a kind of *phenomenological crisis*. No doubt, this “total nonviolence” is what should have animated the promising “politics of pure means” that Benjamin himself announces and of which he even provides some examples, though he does not develop them (see 1921a: 193/51). However, we also know that, in the satellite texts that this critical edition collects, such as “Life and Violence” (a note, written “with my heart”), or “On the Use of Violence” (a review), a violence (which *derives* from what is called “original violence [*ursprüngliche Gewalt*]”; 1916-17b: 791/68), linked to that which the individual (and “only the individual [*nur für den einzelnen*]”; 1920: 105/87) can use, is thinkable and is affirmed. How to understand this *antagonism*? On the one hand, “total nonviolence”; on the other, “usable violence”.

In the first instance, this “original violence”, as it appears for the first and only time on that sheet transcribed by Dora’s handwriting, is used by the individual (Benjamin writes “for example” but seems to be thinking “exemplarily”) when it is exercised “in self-defense”. Now, since the state, the law, monopolizes all violence (1920: 107/88; 1921a: 183/42; it is “the interest” of the law itself, and in monopolizing violence the law acts, precisely, *in self-defense*), the individual must be able to use, *also in self-defense*, violence against the state (1916-17b: 791/68; 1921a: 203/60). However, the right to self-defense is *already* in “contradiction [*Widerspruch*]” with “European legislation” (1921a: 183/44). In “Life and Violence”, Benjamin – who is always interested in drawing a *logic of violence*, governed by the “principle of non-contradiction [*Satz vom Widerspruch*]” – adds that it is for this reason that the anarchists’ *terrorist practice* “is not in contradiction with its theory [*nicht im Widerspruch mit ihrem Theorem*]” (nor with its demand: the “*Abschaffung der Gewalt*”; 1916-17b: 791/68). Two brief clarifications seem necessary: first, in relation to *logic*; second, in relation to *terrorism*.

(1) Following the Kantian distinction, taken from the jurists, between *quid facti* and *quid juris* (Kant, 1781: 125-126/219-220), but going one step further, in “The Judgment of Designation”, Benjamin writes: “Logic does not ask in its problems about the right, but about the meaning of this right [*der Bedeutung diese Rechts*]”. *Recht* is something that is derived. The text continues: “What does it mean that I may conclude like this (or why may I conclude like this? Not: may I conclude like this?). What identity *means* [*Was bedeutet Identität*]. Logic thus analyzes towards judgments of meaning. Language is based on meaning” (1916-17: 10). “Toward the Critique of Violence” could be read against this background: only “pure” violence (“pending [*waltende*]”) *signifies* (logically, identically, truly), while the other, “impure” violences (“attending [*schaltende*]” and “expending [*verwaltete*]” violence) *designate* (juridically, differentially, intentionally; see 1919-20a: 57-59/210-212; also, Fenves, 2011: 125-151).

(2) A classic literary reference to terrorism, related to Sergey Nechaev's *affaire* and his very influent “Catechism” (see Nechaev, 1869: 90-4), is Dostoyevsky's *The Possessed* (1871-72), which Benjamin read around 1916 in Elisabeth Kaerick's translation. Concerning the problem of evil, Benjamin considers that “Stavrogin's Confession” is closely related to the third chapter of *The Songs of Maldoror*, which criticizes the “idealistic bourgeois” and the “philistine” (1929: 304-305/214; there is no reference to Germaine Berton, the murderous anarchist, an *individual* and a woman, who will appear in the synoptic picture of the first issue of *The Surrealist Revolution*). Therefore, violence, *in this strict logical (terrorist) sense*, is not condemned: it remains a meaningful violence of the individual against the *unheimlich* coercion of the law. It is *usable*, as we read with respect to “divine violence” (“revolutionary violence”, which is its “highest manifestation [...] thought human beings”; 1921a: 202/60; also, see 1920: 99/84), “under certain conditions [*bedingungsweise*]”. These conditions seem to be always related to “existential alienation”. *A priori*, what seems difficult about Benjamin's proposal, its *transcendental* problem, is the question of how to delimit the conditions of this use of violence. Of course, I am thinking also of Carl Schmitt, and of Ng's “Afterword” (see 2021: 315)¹: the saviors, *los salvapatrias*, also act in “self-defense”, taking the law into their own hands. To put it another way: how far can one defend “oneself”? “Justice” seems to be the extremely difficult *answer*: when that is the *right thing* to do, *just* what needs to be done. There is a whole juridical delimitation of self-defense, but this is not enough. We know also that this equivocal “self-defense” *articulated* by law is a defense already *defeated* by law (for its mythical dominance). If this is so, what is proposed “under certain conditions”, could be *generalized* and extended (vertiginously). In any case, what is decisive here is that certain

1. “The rescuing act [*die rettende Tat*] of government”, writes the jurist (quoting Rudolf von Jhering) (Schmitt, 1921: ix). In other words: “When legality is enough to save society, legality; when it is not enough, dictatorship [...] dictatorship could be said to be another fact in the divine order” (Donoso Cortés, 1849: 188).

conditions can become terrible (monstrous, *abyssal*) conditions. Benjamin writes:

Those who base the condemnation of every violent killing of a human being by fellow human beings on the commandment ["Thou shalt not kill"] are wrong [*nicht in Recht begründen*]. The commandment exists not as a rule [*Maßstab*] of judgment, but as a guideline of action for the agent or community [*als Richtschnur des Handelns für die handelnde Person oder Gemeinschaft*] that has to face it in its solitude [*Einsamkeit*] and, in terrible cases [*ungeheuren Fällen*], assume the responsibility [*Verantwortung*] of disregarding it [*abzusehen*]. This was the understanding of the commandment in Judaism, which expressly rejected the condemnation of a murder carried out in self-defense [*Notwehr*]. But those thinkers [who raise the objection] refer to a more remote theorem [*ferneres Theorem*] on which they perhaps propose to base [*begründen*] the commandment itself. It is the proposition [*Satz*] concerning the sanctity of life. (1921a: 200-1/58)

This delicate passage appears as a black hole and is the heart of Benjamin's essay. It refers to the commandment "as [a] guideline of action for the agent or community" (not for "society [*Gesellschaft*]") and discusses the responsible and *solitary* use of violence (something like *responsible murder*, to the dismay of many²). It seems to me that the laconic clarification of the passage is found a little further on in "Toward the Critique of Violence", in an oft-quoted line in the middle of a sentence where Benjamin offers "a word against law [*Ein Wort gegen das Recht*]" (1921a: 202/60). That "word" ("language [*Sprache*]" being the "nonviolent sphere [*gewaltlose Sphäre*]" [192/50]) is *the same* "word" that resides in "On language in general and on the language of human beings" (1916b: 149/68). And it is the "word" that appears, decisively, at the end of the text on the centaur, a mythological figure that embodies mythological violence (1917: 67/26). It is "the word", in short, to which the translator's "literal [*wörtlich*]" task is *directed* (1923: 17/259). I would put it this way: "word" and "violence of the individual" (even "in terrible cases") means the *just* response of the oppressed and the *poor* (beyond his/her juridical "mere life"). In an impressive text titled *Bolshevism* (1918), Gershom Scholem, who often visited him at the time, noted the profound conversations between the two, writing (I won't be able to comment on this fragment here, which should be read without *the violent cuts*, and in relation to Benjamin's phrase: "Standing opposed to the pacifists are the Bolsheviks and the Syndicalists"; 1921a: 191/49):

2. Camus became interested in the rational dimension of murder (a *killer reason*) in order to demonstrate its strict *nihilism*, that is, in the possibility (impossible for him) that murder is *not* something *contradictory* (see 1951: 300-324). On the need to establish a limit ("a fair [*juste*] limit"), he *repeats* Aristotle's argument (against the fiery *Heracliteans*) in *Metaphysics* ("murder" would be the best word here to translate "*ἄπειρον*"; 1005b, 25; 1012b, 22). Anyway, Camus writes (thinking about the "extreme hearts" of the "philosopher executioners"): "terrorism kills contradiction itself" (1950: 199, 217, 218); additionally, see 1959: 506. Terrorism is incendiary.

Bolshevism has a central idea, which lends magic to its revolutionary movement. This is: the messianic kingdom can only unfold in the dictatorship of poverty. [...] The poor may not be right [*nicht gerecht*], but he can never be unjust [*niemals ungerecht*]. Poverty, even where it is dictatorial, is not violence [*nicht Gewalt*]. Moscow's theory of the firing squad appears as ethical outcome: the rich man, who is the unjust one [*Ungerechte*], stands before the court. Bolshevism is the attempt at an inverted judgment of God. It kills in the name of a task [*Aufgabe*]. (Scholem, 1918: 556-557/195-196; modified trans.)

I interrupt here the clarification of the cited passage in order to return to Fenves's line that proposes an understanding of the critique of violence "as a manifesto in favor of total nonviolence". I also have recourse, as he too does before making this claim, to Kant. I open the same book: *Critique of Pure Reason*. I turn almost to the same page. It is known that, in the course of the transcendental dialectic, Kant introduces a rare expression: "original action". I read: "An original action [*ursprüngliche Handeln*], through which something happens that previously was not, is not to be expected from the causal connection of phenomena" (1781: 496/538; modified trans. [m.t.]). A little earlier, "action" is defined as "causality of cause". And Kant even goes so far as to call this, precisely, "character". Thus, this action already operates in the work as a strict (*centauric*) unfolding of pure reason: it is the emergence of pure practical reason, which rears its head (the flaming head of freedom) numerous times in this section of the first *Critique*. We perceive the importance of the translation of "transcendental apperception" by *Thathandlung* in Johann G. Fichte. I will not go into any of this, but will merely suggest the following: what Benjamin, in his juvenilia, and following readings of the venerable Laozi promulgated by his beloved teacher Gustav Wyneken, calls the "Doctrine of Non-Action [*Nicht-Handeln Lehre*]", can also be discerned in these pages of *Critique of Pure Reason*. Following Fenves's comment (2021: 27), I would claim that Benjamin is also the inverse of Kant³ on this point: *the moral (and the political) is non-action or wúwéi⁴*, the *indeterminacy* of all *determinations*, a Taoist reversal of Kantian morality. The "strike" is thought of expressly in these borrowed terms: "ein

3. *The End of All Things* describes the doctrine of the Chinese sage as "monstrous": "the monstrous system of Laozi concerning the highest good, that it consists in nothing [*das Ungeheuer von System des Lao-kiun von dem höchsten Gut, das im Nichts bestehen soll*]" (Kant, 1798: 185/228). Benjamin writes: "Justice is the striving to make the world the highest good [*zum höchsten Gut*] [...] No order of possession, however articulated, can therefore lead to justice" (1916a: 401/465).
4. I transcribe some symptomatic verses from the German translation, made by Richard Wilhelm, that Benjamin read and had in his possession (one of his three most prized volumes in his library, Scholem recalled: 2000: 153): "Er verweilt im Wirken ohne Handeln"; "Der Sinne ist ewig ohne Handeln"; "Das Sein entsteht im Nichtsein"; "Beim Nicht-Tun bleibt nichts ungetan" (Laozi, ii, xxxvii, xl, xlvii). On *non-action*, see especially the important epilogue by Harald Gutherz (xxvi-xxxii), who considers Laozi ("as a politician") an "authentic negative anarchist". It does not seem *unlikely* that the "Old Master" was the "true politician", according to the title of Benjamin's truncated project. Fenves and Ng have dedicated rich texts to the *non-action* problem that focuses on other motifs (see 2018 and 2020); also see Pulliero (2013: 837).

Nicht-Handeln” (in his famous essay, Werner Hamacher called the “abstention from action [*Unterlassung in ihrem Handeln*]” *afformative*; 1994: 363). This non-acting, this policy without actors, is, in Benjamin’s thought, liberating (it is saving, rescuing: something like a “rettende Untätigkeit” as a “real state of exception” [1940: 687/392]; m.t.). The fatum of causes and effects is “liberated” morally, politically. I want to recall the lines of the text preceding “Toward the Critique of Violence” in the *Gesammelte Schriften* (“Fate and Character”, 1921), where “the terrible” or “monstrous” appear, likewise:

While fate brings to light the monstrous complexity [*die ungeheure Komplika-tion*] of the guilty person, the complications and bonds of his guilt, character gives this mystical enslavement of the person to the guilt context the answer [*die Antwort*] of genius. Complication becomes simplicity, fate freedom. (1921b, 178/205-206; m.t.)

I will try to clarify the *antagonism* with which I began (“total nonviolence” and “usable violence”), and which is more a kind of *dynamic paradox* than a simple *Widerspruch*. I return, for this, to the interrupted *murder-passage* to say something that I believe is strictly *thinkable* from Benjamin’s exposition: the assassination, “the revolutionary killing of oppressors”, the “terrorist practice”, the “bomb”, must be thought of as the possible *limit point* of the Benjaminian “Doctrine of Non-Action”, or, perhaps at the most extreme: *an unlimited point*. And I believe that this is Benjamin’s inalienable *dialectical heart*: the heart that he not only possessed in 1921, but the heart with which he died. This is a heart that *beats*: we are thinking here certainly not of the “law of the heart” (*Hegel dixit*), but the “culture of the heart [*Kultur des Herzen*]” (1921a: 191/50).⁵ It is the heart *mis à nu*, which will not, I believe, survive any monist implant; that is, it tries to spare itself from contradiction, negation, tearing: “Whereas admittedly the immediate messianic intensity of the heart [*die unmittelbare messianische Intensität*], of the inner man in isolation, passes through misfortune, as suffering” (1938: 204/305-306). It is precisely “Ant-worten”. “Ant-worten” is the *courageous* non-action of “Ent-setzung”: a word (a heart, a *profane heart-word*, a “new heart”; Ha’am, 1895: 107) against the right, *noch einmal*. It is perhaps in this sense that Benjamin is forced to think of violence as *nonviolent*: the primary response arises *not* from an action, but from a non-action: from a *reaction*, a *nihilistic* duty to respond (*Nihilismus* is the “method” of a “world politics”; 1938: 204/306⁶); *non-action is responsibility*. Frankly, regardless of

5. See also, on the intimacy between the “heart” and “literature” *beyond* the “slavery of Scriptures”, Achad Ha’am (the “cultural Zionist”), 1895: 100.
6. Thinking of the image of the opposite lines, Fenves has pointed to the *quantum* background of the “Theological-Political Fragment” from Benjamin’s encounter with Arthur S. Eddington’s book *The Nature of the Physical World* (1929; see Fenves, 2017). The French-Romanian philosopher, Stéphane Lupasco, who was close to several figures of the Surrealist movement and whom Benjamin does not seem to have met, *formalized* the logical dimension of quantum mechanics in the terms of a “principle of antagonism” or “logic of energy” (see 1951).

whether Emil Lederer thought so, I don't think there is any "Saint Walter", in the vein of Marx and Engels' sharp caricature of Bruno Bauer and Max Stirner in *The German Ideology* (1846). What, then, is "Ant-worten" as "Non-Action"? "Walter Benjamin's life lies in deep parallel with Laozi's" (Scholem, 2000: 146): despite his pitiful physical condition, taking his Taoist readings a little further, I *imagine* Benjamin more as a Chinese martial arts master (the "individual") who takes advantage of the violent *action* of the sudden aggressor (the "state") to *gently* paralyze him (a passive achievement): *Stillstand des Lebens*, "an oriental mode of vision" (1914-15: 121/31). A chapter of *Huainanzi* dedicated to military art might clarify the meaning of this last *non-image*:

Be without form and control what has form, be without purpose and respond to alterations [...] Of all things that have an image, there is not [one] that cannot be defeated; of all things that have form, there is none for which there is no response. This is why the sage lodges in Nothingness and lets his mind roam in Emptiness. [...]. Among things there is none that is not controlled by its motion. For this reason, the sage values stillness. He is still and thus can respond to agitation; he follows and thus can respond to one who leads. (Anonym, s. II a.C: 599, 600)

Pacifism (which is not "non-violence", but something *else*) would be the "most remote theorem" of "Toward the Critique of Violence". That is to say, it is the foundation or *Grund*; the complete basis, *Grundsatz*. A little further on, Benjamin translates this word in favor of his own interests: "the dogma", a foundation that goes too far; a violent, imposing foundation. Or, in other words: the petrified, coactive, genesis. Pacifism is something that does not (and never wanted to) escort the history of violence; it wants to stay outside, beyond (μετὰ, ἐπέκεινα, etc.). Paradoxically, in Kurt Hiller – who ended up personally hating Benjamin – pacifism is linked to activism: and it is related to a "childish anarchism" (1921a: 187/46) or "ethical anarchism", a "contradictory [*widerspruchsvoll*]" position (1920: 105/87): "Deny that the state and the individual have the right to apply force/use violence".

Thanks to the work of Lisa Marie Anderson, one of the many virtues of this critical edition is to incorporate the postscript "Anti-Cain", an important if largely unknown text, the last lines of which are: "Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not kill even for the sake of an idea. For no idea is more sublime [*erhabener*] than the living" (Hiller, 1919: 193)⁷. Therefore, Benjamin seems to be

7. The text began by proposing, against "Cain's methods", "the attempt to be Abel". Hiller added: "The radical pacifist [...] sits to the left of the Bolshevik [an 'intellectual terrorist'] in the parliament of humanity [...] *We anti-terrorists must make a start*". It is *fundamental* not to misunderstand this position; he says: "Self-defense? [...] I do not justify his counter-violence if it uses guns and grenades; but I do pardon it and am disgusted by those trigger-happy 'socialists' who call it a crime—for no one who uses terror himself may be indignant when others use it, whether against another class or another nation. The instigators and endorsers of the world war were terrorists. Their terror was bloodier than that of Spartacus..." (Hiller, 1919: 24, 25, 26/185, 186, 187).

obliged to clarify the *last line* of this text, that is, to indicate the ultimate meaning, *the exceptional and abyssal meaning*, of the commandment, a guideline of action (“for the agent or community”), not a rule of judgment. Moreover, it is necessary “to seek the basis [*Grund*] of the commandment no longer in what the deed does to the murder victim, but in what the deed does to God and to the perpetrator himself” (1921a: 201/59).

To put it another way: pacifism is dogmatic, it is the strict absence of criticism, of critical demonstration; it is “pre-” or “post-” Kantian – a *false outside*. Pacifist, Benjamin says, can only be, *à proprement parler*, the martyr, looking to the sky, crushed by the fervor of the enemy, but *the political individual*, with his “boundless skepticism” (see 1914: 74/169; 1920: 107/88), can only be *nonviolent*. We could say that the metaphysical dogmatism of the pacifist, in fact, concentrates on “the dogma of the sanctity of life [*Heiligkeit des Lebens*]”, “the latest aberration of a weakened Western Tradition” (1921a: 202/59). Adam was only peaceful when alone in Paradise, before the *Antwort* of Eve, the first materialist in the history of Western culture. That is to say, the political individual, the “true politician”, cannot but be nonviolent (*logically violent*) “under certain conditions”, occasions that can become “terribles, monstrous, cases”: these cases are the nonviolent *Ungrund* of any violent *Grund*. Benjamin writes:

As desirable and gratifying as an advanced parliament may be in comparison [with today’s versions; F.R.], however, a discussion of the means of political accords that are in principle nonviolent [*gewaltloser Mittel*] cannot be concerned with parliamentarianism. For what parliamentarianism achieves in vital affairs can only be those legal orders that are afflicted by violence [*mit Gewalt*] in origin and outcome. (191/50)

I believe that the clause that starts *in English* with “however” in this last fragment must be read since the “end of violence”, “a new historical era” (i.e. “the coming world”, 1919-20b: 99/83), which the last paragraph of the text announces (see 1921a: 202/60). And I also think that, in this sense, Ng’s translation of the nonmythic and tautological “waltende Gewalt” as “pending violence” is a philosophical achievement of primary importance. The “politics of pure means”, the *total* (truly) nonviolent politics, has something like *a first moment*, a nihilistic urgency, a task that could be named *partial* (halfway) nonviolent politics (noncontradictory violence) and which Benjamin understands as “self-defense” (to defend us, “me”): the destruction of the state, *Abbau der Gewalt*, *Entsetzung des Rechts*. And this is the most *immediate* sense of the aforementioned *vertiginous generalization*: idealization. So, will the consideration of this *justice-beyond-the-law* not require, above all, a “delicate empiricism”? (*Goethe dixit*). The state, the law, is for him the first aggressor, the assailant not of “mere life” (which is *already* dead), but of the “soul of the living” (*anima mundi*)⁸.

8. We read in *Tao Te Ching*: “das hohe Leben sucht nicht sein Leben, also hat es Leben [...] Das hohe Leben ist ohne Handeln und ohne Absicht” (xxxviii).

In 1921, the destruction of the state was the *impure means* for a politics of *pure means* to bear fruit: a “futurist” (*innocent*) politics. In other words: we can always try to *practice* this pure politics (this *language*: “nonviolent [*gewaltlose*] resolution of conflicts”) *before* the *presupposed* “end of violence”, but only under the shadow of *guilt* and the possibility of *terrible and just* cases. This is because “just existence [*gerechtes Dasein*]” is *higher* (more *sublime*, to recover Hiller’s word against the grain) than existence (201/59). Justice is thus presented as *the sublime itself*; it is not a “mere manifestation” but a pure and *ausdruckslos* manifestation: the sought-after *higher order* (193/51). Undoubtedly, this – to murder *someone* in “self-defense” – was the most exact, absolute, definition of *solitude* in Western Philosophy⁹. It is something like a *monstrous nonviolence*. As “toward” suggests, perhaps the critique of violence is *ultimately* impossible. Perhaps there is only “earthly world”, “fulfilled actions”, non-(*messianic*) actions, hearty actions, but *not* a “world of fulfillment”: *nicht für uns*. “Theocracy”, the rule of God carried out by human beings, is impossible. “Theocracy”, or theocratic anarchism (Scholem, 1980: 108), is just a name, for the highest wrath of God, the *true outside*. As the poet of poets wrote in some premonitory oracular verses of *antagonist* fulfillment: “Where the danger is, grows that which saves [*das Rettende*] also” (Hölderlin, 1803: 165).

Bibliographical references

- ANONYME. *The Huainanzi*. New York: Columbia U.P., 2010, 580-615.
- ARISTOTLE. *Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1924.
- BENJAMIN, Walter. *Gesammelte Schriften (GS)*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991.
- (1914). “Die religiöse Stellung der neuen Jugend”, *GS II.1*, 71-74 [*Early Writings*. Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 2011, 168-170].
- (1914-5). “Zwei Gedichte von Friedrich Hölderlin”, *GS II.1*, 105-126 [*Selected Writings (SW)*. Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1996, vol. 1, 18-36].
- (1915). “Das Leben der Studenten”, *GS II.1*, 75-87 [*SW I*, 37-37].
- (1916a). “Notizen zur einer Arbeit über die Kategorie der Gerechtigkeit”. Scholem, Gershom, *Tagebücher*. Frankfurt: Jüdischer, 1995-2000, vol. 1, 401-402 [*Toward the Critique of Violence. A Critical Edition (TCV)*. Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2021, 65-66].
- (1916b). “Über Sprache überhaupt und über Sprache des Menschen”, *GS II.1*, 140-157 [*SW 1*, 62-74].
- (1916-17a). “Das Urteil der Bezeichnung”, *GS VI*, 9-11.
- (1916-17b). “Leben und Gewalt”, *GS VII.2*, 791 [*TCV*, 68]; Benjamin-Archiv, Ms 505.
9. “Solitude” not only defines the criminal act, but for the young Benjamin *the community itself* and its “capacity to love” [1915: 81/42]; the eventual logical crime of the community in certain and terrible conditions is thus *intensely solitary*; “agent or community” must be understood, according to the logical scheme of “the right to the use of violence”, as *asocial individuals* against the state and its “public opinion”.

- (1917). “Der Centaur”, *GS VII*, 26 [TCV, 67].
- (1919-20a). “Über den ‘Kreter’”, *GS VI*, 57-59 [SW I, 210-212].
- (1919-20b). “Welt und Zeit”, *GS VI*, 98-100 [TCV, 83-44].
- (1920). “Das Recht zur Gewaltanwendung”, *GS VI*, 104-108 [TCV, 86-89].
- (1920-1). “Die Bedeutung der Zeit in der moralischen Welt“, *GS VI*, 97-98 [TCV, 81-82].
- (1921a). “Zur Kritik der Gewalt”, *GS II.1*, 179-203 [TCV, 39-61].
- (1921b). “Schicksal und Charakter”, *GS II.1*, 171-179 [SW I, 201-206].
- (1923). “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers”, *GS II.2*, 9-21 [SW I, 253-263].
- (1929). “Der Surrealismus”, *GS II.1*, 295-310 [SW 2.1, 207-221].
- (1938). “Theologisch-politisches Fragment”, *GS II.1*, 203-204 [SW 3, 305-306].
- (1940). “Über den Begriff der Geschichte”, *GS I.2*, 691-704 [SW 4, 389-400].
- CAMUS, Albert. *Ceuvres complètes*. Paris: Gallimard, 2008.
- (1951). *L'homme révolté*, vol. 3, 61-324.
- (1959). *Les possédés*, vol. 4, 395-552.
- CORTÉS, Donoso. *Obras completas*. Madrid: BAC, 1946.
- (1849). “Discurso sobre la dictadura”, vol. 2, 187-204.
- DOSTOYEVSKY, Fiódor M. (1871-72). *The possessed*. Melbourne, William Heinemann, 1914.
- FENVES, Peter (2011). *The Messianic Reduction*. Stanford: Stanford U.P., 125-151.
- (2017). “Toward Messianic Nature—from Cohen to Benjamin”. *Paradigmi: Rivista di critica filosofica*, 35, 13-25.
- (2018). “Benjamin, Studying, China”. *Positions*, 26 (1), 35-57.
- (2020). “A Close Affinity with the Concept of the *Dao*”. *Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art*, 41 (6), 68-74.
- (2021). “Introduction”. *TCV*, 1-37.
- HA'AM, Achad (1904). *Am Scheidewege*. Berlin: Jüdischer.
- (1895). “Die Lehre des Herzens”, Bd. 1, 98-114.
- HAMACHER, Werner (1994). “Afformativ, Streik”. *Was heißt Darstellen?* Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 340-371.
- HILLER, Kurt (1919). “Anti-Kain”. *Das Ziel: Jahrbücher für geistige Politik* 3 (1919): 24-32 [TCV, 185-193].
- HÖLDERLIN, Friedrich. *Sämtliche Werke*: Kohlhammer, 1951.
- (1807). “Patmos”, Bd. 2, 165-172.
- KANT, Immanuel. *Gesammelte Schriften (GS)*. Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1910-2009.
- (1781/89). *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, *GS 2* [Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1999].
- (1794). “Das Ende aller Dinge”, *GS 6*, 175-90 [217-31. En: *Religion and Rational Theology*, Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1996].
- LAOZI. *TaoteKing*. Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1910.

- LUPASCO, Stéphane (1951). *Le principe d'antagonisme et la logique de l'énergie*. Paris: Hermann.
- NECHAEV, Serge (1869). "The Catechism of a Revolutionary". Philip Pomper, *Sergei Nechaev*. New Brunswick: Rutgers U.P., 1979, 90-94.
- NG, Julia (2021). "Afterword". *TCV*, 113-60.
- (2021). "The Action of Non-Action". *Theory, Culture & Society* (Forthcoming).
- PULLIERO, Marino (2013). *Walter Benjamin. Le désir d'authenticité*. Paris: Hermann.
- SCHOLEM, Gershom (1918). "Der Bolschewismus". *Tagebücher*, vol. 2, 556-558 [Jacobson, Eric. *Metaphysics of the Profane*, New York: Columbia U.P., 2003, 195-196].
- (1980). *Walter Benjamin—die Geschichte einer Freundschaft*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- SCHMITT, Carl (1921). *Die Diktatur*. München: Duncker & Humblot.