

Workshop: Representing Violence: History, Politics and Theory (June 10, 18 & 19)

Organized by Jyotirmaya Sharma and Martin van Gelderen

At the Lichtenberg-Kolleg, Göttingen

Despite periodic reassurances, the hope that was promised and guaranteed by the twin processes of modernization and secularization has amounted to very little in the 20th and the 21st centuries. The force of ethnic, racial, religious and national identities remains as potent as ever, transcending, and often nullifying, the combined influence of factors such as reason, science and democracy. It is also ironic that despite the universal claims of the secularization and modernization thesis, the persistence of violence has remained one of the most powerful elements that casts its spell unmindful of ideologies, regimes and nationalities. The works of Hannah Arendt, Georges Sorel, Walter Benjamin, Frantz Fanon, Konrad Lorenz, Ernest Jünger, Ambedkar and Gandhi have been significant attempts in the past hundred years to conceptualize and understand violence. While these texts have enriched our understanding of various textures of violence, we are also constantly assailed by the sheer inventiveness and novelty of forms of violence. The ways in which political regimes and social groups tend to refine, perfect and practice violence seem often to suggest the inadequacy and obsolete state of our conceptual and theoretical apparatuses.

This workshop would be an attempt to take stock of the ways in which we understand violence but also the manner in which our ability to write about violence can be honed and perfected. One way of doing this is to re-evaluate the histories of violence and their efficacy. Do we really need to revisit extant accounts of violence that are already available to us? Are all the orthodoxies, self-images and myths that help in understanding violence been adequately interrogated? Another way of examining the question is to suggest alternative ways of looking at the phenomenon and propose additional tools to make sense of violence and its representation. These two sets of questions can only be answered through a thoroughgoing reappraisal of theories, historiographical practices and conceptual universes within a comparative framework.

Programme

Representing Violence: History, Politics and Theory – Part II – Tuesday, 18 June 2013

9:00am : Arrival & Coffee

9:15am: Session 1 – Welcome & Introduction: Chair: Martin van Gelderen

9:30am: John McCormick – University of Chicago – **Legitimate and Illegitimate Uses of State Violence: Carl Schmitt and Franz Neumann on the Nazi 'Behemoth'**

"The Fuehrer Protects the Law" was Carl Schmitt's first full-scale endorsement of the National Socialist State. In this address to German lawyers, Schmitt justified Adolph Hitler's recourse to apparently illegal violence during the bloody "Roehm Purge" in 1934. Drawing upon his own critique of liberal pluralism from the Weimar Era, and the specter of the allies' treatment of Germany under the Versailles Treaty of 1919, Schmitt makes Hitler's seemingly antilegal bloodletting actually fully lawful under circumstances where such violence is exercised by a properly legitimated leader who defends the Volk's "right to life."

Toward the end of the Second World War, Schmitt's former student, Franz Neumann, in Behemoth, criticized the arbitrary violence committed by the Nazi State, and excoriated Schmitt's justification of the latter. In my paper, I would like to explore the extent to which Neumann's critique relies perhaps too heavily on Schmitt's own criticisms of liberal pluralism to be fully successful. Moreover, I focus on a very specific tension in Neumann's treatment of Schmitt within the text of Behemoth: On the one hand, his explicit, determined effort to render Schmitt's Weimar legal and political theory inherently Nazi, and, on the other, the ways that Neumann's narrative—especially its invocation of authors very closely associated with Schmitt, such as Hobbes and Donoso-Cortes—actually liberates Schmitt's Weimar writings from National Socialist taint.

In conclusion, I bring together elements of both Schmitt and Neumann's work to formulate a more coherent criticism of arbitrary state violence.

10:30am: Coffee Break

10:45am: Liisi Keedus – University of Tartu – **Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin: Philosophical Reflections on the Ideological Basis of Political Violence**

These three European émigré political philosophers spent most of their working lives in the context of increasingly practically oriented post WW II American political science that sought scientific solutions to the problem of violence, be it violent revolutions that had recently ravaged and were still ravaging the world, the possibility of acceleration of the conflict of the Cold War, or simply explaining the causes of such wide acceptance of totalitarian regimes in Europe, with a view to avoiding history repeating itself. Arendt, Strauss and Voegelin by contrast – burdened by the same predicaments – turned to the distant history of Western political thought. All three provocatively argued not only that ideologically-based political violence was rooted in specifically modern conceptions of the theory-practice relation, but that it was precisely due to contemporary social scientists' adherence to the same presumptions that made them definitively unable to grasp the causes, let alone solve the problem of violence. What was their reasoning behind such conclusions? What – if any – relevance do their reflections bear on contemporary attempts to understand and speak about violence?

11:45am: Coffee Break

12:00: Tommaso Giordani – European University Institute, Florence – **On the need for violence: Sorel and the degeneration of capitalism**

The purpose of this paper is that of making sense of the role of violence in Sorel's most famous book, the 1908 *Reflections on Violence*. The issue is often misunderstood and relegated to the supposed 'irrationalism' and 'vitalism' which apparently characterise Sorel's work. In the paper I propose a synthetic outline of the development of Sorel's syndicalist theory from the beginning of the century until 1908, arguing that its focal point is a reflection on the timeliness of Marxism in a period of capitalist decadence and statist expansion. The problem, similar to the one faced by Bernstein a decade before, is solved by Sorel through a conceptualisation of class struggle whose aim is the defeat of the state and the re-institution of the clash between capital and labour. I argue that it is within this context that it is possible to understand the need for violence defended in Sorel's *Reflections*.

1:00pm – Lunch

Session 2: Chair: Jyotirmaya Sharma

2:30pm: Raphael Gross – University of London – **November 1938 - The Case of Herschel Grynszpan**

On November 7th, 1938, at the German embassy in Paris, a desperate Jewish youth, Herschel Feibel Grynszpan, fired five shots at the diplomat Ernst Eduard vom Rath. The attack became an excuse for an unprecedented wave of violence against hundreds of thousands of German Jews and their apartments, businesses and synagogues throughout the German Reich.

Despite the many years since his attack on vom Rath, whether Herschel Grynszpan was a child of his time, a disturbed young man, a murderer acting for personal reasons or a hero, continues to be judged in very different ways. The talk will tell the story of Herschel Grynszpan and discuss the different perspectives on his case.

3:30pm: Coffee Break

3:45pm: Cesare Cuttica – Université Paris 8 – **Shifting violence and shifting targets: Jesuits, Puritans and the mob in early modern France and England**

My paper focuses on political and theoretical debates carried out in France and England in the period from ca. 1580 up to ca. 1650. Centre stage will be a series of texts (treatises, sermons, pamphlets etc.) devoted to attack through a variegated spectrum of images three main targets – the Jesuits, the Puritans and the many-headed multitude – as groups that pursued, encouraged and justified violence as a legitimate means to achieve political goals. From endorsement of resistance theories to justifications of regicide and tyrannicide the three (often loosely defined) categories mentioned above will be taken as examples of how violence was depicted in political thought, especially at three significant historical moments. The years 1589, 1610 and 1649 saw the killing of three monarchs – tyrants according to some – in France and England, respectively. What caused these murders? How were they received in the two countries and, to a certain extent, beyond? What justifications were set out to defend the legitimacy of these extraordinary acts? What counterattacks did they provoke on the part of those who saw them as execrable actions? What legacy did the controversies surrounding them have? To these questions my paper will attempt to provide an answer. Amongst the thinkers whose works will be here examined are Robert Bellarmine, Francisco Suarez, John Milton, Robert Filmer, Claudius Salmasius and a good range of less-known figures too.

4:45pm: Coffee Break

5:00pm: Martin van Gelderen – Director, Lichtenberg-Kolleg – **In the Eye of**

Providence:

Violence, Arminianism and Calvinism

The 1619 Synod of Dordrecht was a watershed for European Calvinists. For a decade followers of the Leiden theologian Jacobus Arminius argued against the idea of predestination, that God divided mankind unconditionally into elect and reprobate. The alternative Arminian concept of salvation looked at the interplay between man's will and God's grace in different ways. The Arminian struggle was in vain. The 1619 Synod affirmed predestination as a core dogma of European Calvinism.

These theological debates entailed a heated dispute on the relationship between 'civil' and 'ecclesiastical' authority. Was the church, as Calvinists claimed, autonomous in deciding theological controversy, or, was it, as Hugo Grotius argued, as public institution part of the commonwealth and subject to civil government?

This paper explores the role of violence in the rhetorical strategies of Arminians and Calvinists. Whilst Calvinists clung unto predestination by arguing through *assertio*, Arminians followed the line Erasmus had adopted in the debate with Luther, insisting on the principle to deliberate *in utramque partem* to cast doubt on Calvinist certainties. More specifically the paper explores why and how both parties lost themselves in the heat of the debate and decided, against all principles of Calvinist church discipline, to adopt satire and libel as rhetorical strategies. Visual Calvinist satire is at the heart of the paper.

Wednesday 19 June: Representing Violence: History, Politics and Theory – Part III –

Göttinger Streitgespräche zu Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit

(in cooperation with the Zentrum für Mittelalter und Frühneuzeit Forschung)

Machiavelli and Violence – Machiavelli und Gewalt

10:00 am : Arrival & Coffee

10:15: Presentations by: John McCormick -University of Chicago

**Matthias Roick - University of Göttingen/Herzog August
Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel**

Philip Hölzing - Suhrkamp Verlag Berlin

Five centuries ago, the Florentine humanist Niccolo Machiavelli wrote *Il Principe*, *The Prince*, perhaps the most famous –and infamous– text in the history of European Political Thought. Against all currents of humanist political thought Machiavelli seemed to argue that in order to maintain their princely status and be successful rulers, princes should not always act in accordance with the cardinal virtues of justice, prudence, temperance and fortitude. It may in fact be prudent for a prince to merely appear virtuous, to be dishonest, to lie and cheat, and as some of the most notorious passages suggest, to resort to violence as a tool of politics.

This Streitgespräch reassesses the role of violence in Machiavelli's political thought.

The opening statements come from three highly innovative Renaissance scholars and political theorists. John McCormick's study, *Machiavellian Democracy* (Cambridge, 2011) fundamentally reassesses Machiavelli's political thought and decisively intervenes into current debates over institutional design and democratic reform. Matthias Roick's study of Giovanni Pontano's ethical thought is forthcoming with Brill and Philip Hölzing's study *Republikanismus und Kosmopolitismus: Eine ideengeschichtliche Studie* (Campus Verlag, 2011) offers a fine and sweeping overview of Republican thought – from Cicero to Machiavelli to the present.

Followed by lunch.