

Chapter 2

Understanding Violence

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You must know that there are two ways of contesting, the one by law, the other by force: the first method is proper to man, the second to beasts. But because the first is frequently not sufficient, it is necessary to have recourse to the second.

Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chap. 18 (1989).

What is clear from what Machiavelli proposes in the quotation above is the legitimacy of violence in certain circumstances. He would prefer if the first method—the reign of law in interpersonal relations—were to become the dominant method of conflict resolution. However, he is convinced that the reign of law does not prevail everywhere. There are circumstances in which the law either proves ineffective in checking violence or is flouted with disdain. These circumstances are associated with social conditions in which the law fails in regulating interpersonal relations and in checking the propensity to take recourse to violence. Though several factors may be responsible for this, it is not necessary to go into all of them.

It is necessary, however, to point out that Machiavelli also hints at the unreliability of law as a sole method of keeping and maintaining normalcy, a normalcy that abhors the use of violence in safeguarding the smooth functioning of social interactions free of violence. He has no illusions about the efficacy of law in keeping violence at bay insofar as the peaceful conduct of interpersonal as well as public affairs is concerned. When Machiavelli points to the need for using violence as the ultimate weapon for preventing violence from perverting social life and

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relations, he is quite clear that it is not for all and sundry to take matters into their hands. What he signifies is that it is solely for the prince to intervene and restore normalcy violated by the occurrence of violence.

But can we be sure that the prince as the personification of law can always be relied upon to take note of the emergent violent situation, or to intervene in time to prevent the situation from getting out of hand, or, more importantly, to be successful in checking the recurrence of violence? Needless to say that there are too many “ifs” involved here. The distance, both physical and administrative, between the ruler and the ruled, the erosion of social control, and the ease with which tempers fly at the slightest provocation—all these factors contrive a situation in which recourse to violence cannot be easily prevented. Moreover, one cannot rely solely on the efficacy of law in preventing acts of violence and in uprooting violence from the psyche of individuals. We should not lose sight of the fact that the law often loses its educative value and fails to modulate the overbearing pressure of self-interest, and yields its place to rational commensuration.

Another question about Machiavelli’s advice to the prince pertains to his judgment about the propriety of preferring the way of man rather than that of the beast in a situation where contest becomes unavoidable. There is no doubt that the ways of man are always preferable. However, the question cannot be evaded as to how a person makes a successful transition from the state of being a beast to that of being a man in the act of contesting. One stream of thinking underlines the unavoidability of conflict in a situation where matters of self-interest divide men into two broad categories, “we” and “they”. This division becomes instrumental in provoking conflict if interests collide. However, it is claimed that these conflicts can be successfully tackled and overcome by resorting to rational persuasion. Habermas speaks of the effectiveness of “discursive competence” (1979) in resolving conflicts; this is one pointer in this direction. However, it is forgotten that some interest-based conflicts touch such deep-rooted convictions or dearly held entitlements that no rational argument can control the violence with which these are defended.

So it is necessary to address the question of the transition from the state of being a beast to the state of being a man in conducting interpersonal relations, if society has to be freed from incidents of violence. It is a question that statesmen, thinkers, philosophers and sages have throughout the ages preoccupied themselves with. It is universally acknowledged that violence is an unavoidable part of human existence. The old saying that one being is the food of another illustrates this well. As early as the Vedic civilization, it was recognized that there exists an inescapable relationship between *anna* and *annada* (food and the eater of food). Recognizing the disastrously upsetting consequences of the phenomenon of violence that goes beyond the simple biological fact, numerous ways and means—religious, social, political—have been recommended to overcome, if not completely eliminate it. And yet violence persists; moreover, it has assumed serious proportions in modern times. Thus while the phenomenon of violence has been ubiquitous, making its appearance in all varieties of time and space, what is distinctive about it in modern times is its pervasiveness, its virulence and the frequency of its recurrence.

In view of the fact that the scale and the intensity of violence have been increasing over time, there arise certain questions that must be satisfactorily answered before we can begin to understand what constitutes or causes violence, what triggers off its occurrence and its occasional eruption on a large scale. It needs to be kept in mind that every society in the world is afflicted, in one way or the other, with violence that affects individual lives, social relations, national affairs and international relations. The situation is, to say the least, characterized by a serious paradox which, as we shall see later, gives birth to other paradoxes. This paradox lies in the fact that as civilization has advanced from the rude conditions of primitive times to the growing wealth and comfort of modern times, as primitive conditions have yielded to elegant lifestyles boasting of high culture, violence, too, has kept pace. We witness today an unprecedented increase in the incidence of violence in all areas of life.

The pervasiveness of violence signifies a state of affairs where increasing recourse to force for solving existential problems has become a *fait accompli*. Long ago, Niccolo Machiavelli, as already pointed out, talked of two ways of contesting, the one by law and, the other, by force; the first method is proper to man and the second to beast. But because the first is frequently not sufficient, it becomes necessary to resort to the second. When Machiavelli refers to the way proper for man in a contest, he does not by any means offer a justification of the use of force in settling disputes or resolving conflicts. It is, in a more important sense, a public acknowledgement of the inefficacy of the law in taming the beast in man. This indicates that something more effective is required to tame the beast in man, so that social relations in which minimal violence is taken recourse of can be founded. Here one encounters a conundrum: a device that was forged to tame the beast in man must be supplemented and, at times, supplanted, by the forceful assertion of the beast in man, for both legitimizing law and for compensating for its weakness.

The descent of man into beastliness is also indicative of the erosion of the sense of fellow-feeling and goodwill, signifying the loss of a larger vision of life. It suggests that man has become so self-centred and self-engrossed that he lives only for himself. A self-centred man demands liberty which he can exercise for promoting and furthering whatever he considers to be contributing to the realization of his self-defined purposes. It also signifies that he must, on the one hand, compete vigorously with others and, on the other, engage in a continuous battle for removing constraints on his action. It must be made clear here that the state of affairs in which every man must, at one and the same time, collaborate and compete, has overtaken the whole world; this happened with the cataclysmic changes that made their appearance in the seventeenth century in Western Europe. One of the contributory factors is, of course, the far-going change that took place over the passage of time, in the way man viewed the phenomenon of liberty. Broadly speaking, four different significations of the term "liberty" can be identified here. The traditional Indian concept of liberty is articulated in terms of liberation of the soul from its bondage to worldly ties and its merger with the Great Soul. It is the quest of liberation that is considered to constitute a firm foundation for fellow-feeling and sociality. It is asserted that it is only through the love of God that

one can love the creatures of God. The focus of liberty in the Indian tradition of thought is man engaged in the pursuit of the eternal rather than man as the player of different roles in the phenomenal world.

In contrast to the Indian concept of liberty, the Greek concept focuses on man as a citizen. For the Greeks, liberty was more than a right; it was a duty. The citizen owed everything to the city and placed such a value on his freedom to participate in its government that he could not even conceive of individual freedom in any other sense. Thus freedom was just another name for civic obligation. With Christianity, however, appeared the notion that all human beings have equal rights because all have equal moral responsibilities. Hence it is the duty of every man to recognize that others too enjoy equal rights. Christianity juxtaposed *homo religiosus* or *homo credens* against the Greek idea of man as citizen and in stressing, as it did, the moral equality of men, it promoted the idea of equality before law. In contradistinction to all the three different versions of liberty delineated above, the modern notion of liberty, inspired by the Germanic idea of liberty, does include the idea of obligation and underlines preference for independence against all other goods. Nevertheless, the notion of liberty is not liberty for good, but liberty for itself; it does not lead to a moral end but is an end unto itself. It has value because it gives the man of pride a sense of his own worth. It does entail obligation but only in regard to oneself.

Obligation in regard to oneself, when conjoined to the centrality of the pursuit of self-interest or, to put it differently, self-love, introduces two fateful separations in the human world. The first separation that occurs pertains to the isolation of one man from the other and the second relates to the isolation of man from the citizen. It is interesting to note that there was a time when the free play of self-interest was viewed as providing a corrective to human passion in contrast with the earlier times when it was considered to be something condemnable. Note for example that Montesquieu considered the pursuit of self-interest to produce certain moral virtues. The virtues, he asserted, have their root in the commercial spirit which flows out of the coupling of individualism with self-interest or, self-love, and brings with it frugality, moderation, order and tranquillity.¹ Montesquieu maintained that "it is fortunate that men—in a situation in which, when their passions inspire in them the thought of being wicked, it is in their own interest not to be".² Also important to note in this connection, is the currency in the eighteenth century of the theory that unfettered pursuit of self-interest lays the foundation for natural harmony of interest. Mandeville's famous dictum of private vice leading to public benefit is a case in point.

Soon, however, depredations of the pursuit of self-interest evoked adverse reactions. Alexis de Tocqueville, for example, was one of the critics who did not find the pursuit of self-interest naturally leading to virtues as Montesquieu had earlier claimed. The reason behind this is what Wolin (1987) calls the endlessness

¹See *The Spirit of Law*, Bk. III. a. 7.

²*The Spirit of Law*, Bk. 21, Chap. 20.

of needs as the natural consequence of the single-minded pursuit of self-interest. Needs proliferate endlessly and deepen the isolation of one from all others. This happens especially in a situation where the pursuit of self-interest eclipses moral sensitivity, as it is bound to do. As Tocqueville (1959, Book 14, p. 105) notes:

When the appetite for material pleasures develops more rapidly than enlightenment and habits of freedom in a (democratic) people, there comes a time when men lose control of themselves at the sight of new goods there for the taking. Preoccupied with the single thought of making a fortune, they no longer see the close connection that exists between the private wealth of individuals and the prosperity of all.

The tendency to turn a blind eye to the close connection between the private wealth of individuals and the prosperity of all is consequent upon the separation of man from man. This further leads to the isolation of the citizen from man. To quote Tocqueville (1959, p. 105) again,

Individualism is a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself.

This isolation is the product of a mistaken idea that individual ties are essentially and totally distinct from political ties. Working under this mistaken idea, individuals become indifferent to their duties as citizens. It is in this sense that we can appreciate why the convergence of individualism and self-love is thrust to the foreground of human existence. Selfishness may possibly combine with a number of private virtues and domestic qualities; however, this is sure to make them honest men and poor citizens (as cited in Lamberti 1989, p. 184).

The eclipse of the citizen by the self-interested individual is one of the major factors in the deterioration of public life and the emergence of the State as a monolith that has acquired all kinds of monopolies and has developed hundreds of eyes to pry into the private affairs of the citizen. These are not the only consequences of the convergence of liberty and self-love and the isolation of man from the citizen. It also enslaves man himself. And the citizen separated from man is a citizen who has no claim to rights that legitimately belong to a citizen. As Tocqueville (1959, Vol. 2, p. 147) notes:

There is no need to deprive such citizens of what rights they possess; they voluntarily give them up. The exercise of their political duties seems to them a waste of time, which distracts them from their business. These people believe that they are following the doctrine of self-interest, of which they have but a crude idea, and in order to attend more fully to what they call their affairs, they neglect the chief affair, which is to remain their own masters.

And when citizens lose control over themselves, that is, when auto-control undergoes severe erosion, a situation is created which comes to be characterized by the erosion of sociality. It does not mean the complete annihilation of sociality; it survives but in a greatly transformed shape. It survives only as collaboration, based on expediency, only for mutual advantage in a highly competitive environment. In the words of Tocqueville (1959, p. 147):

Each of them (human beings), living apart, is a stranger to the fate of all the rest; his children and his private friends constitute for him the whole of mankind. As for the rest of his fellow citizens, he is close to them, but he does not see them; he touches them but he does not feel them; he exists only for himself alone; and if his kindred still remain to him, he may be said at any rate to have lost his country.

Breaking of the bond of sociality is symptomatic of the erosion of morality; when morality evaporates, a person loses auto-control. With the loss of auto-control (or autarchy), a person becomes what the *Chhandogya Upanishad* calls *kamachara* or, Plato's felicitous term: he becomes the slave of many mad masters. This is the recognition of the fact that the ruling element in the interior of man is no more the soul or *nous* which has traditionally been identified as the seat and sensorium of the divine and which, by virtue of this, was the ruler of man's interior. Since the soul has been driven out of power, the effective rule has shifted to multitudinous passions. And since man is ruled by his passions, he is frequently reduced to the level of the beast who, as Rousseau (1923) observes, must find his advantage in the misfortune of his neighbours. This may not always lead to violence; however, it helps develop a social order in which inequality, oppression and deprivation of various sorts prevail. It is this situation that Galtung (1969) identified as "structural violence".

The descent of man to the level of the beast leads Rousseau to reflect again: "What must be the state of things when all men are forced to caress and destroy one another at the same time and when they are born enemies by duty and knaves by interest" (Rousseau 1923, p. 241). The consequences of such a state of affairs are obvious: the prevalence of violence, whether structural or not, in a social order whose animating force is the fear of violence. The state comes into being as a result of this pervasive fear of violence and depends on the rule of law to minimize, if not completely eliminate, violence. But as we will see later, the rule of law usually proves ineffective in curbing and controlling the excesses of violence. It is, therefore, not surprising that all traditional ways of thinking, including philosophical thinking, underline the need to embrace *ahimsa* (nonviolence) as an active principle to guide the ship of life in the turbulent sea of passions. But, then, it must be asked: What is *ahimsa*?

Given this central question, we must ask further: can it be defined, more or less accurately, so as to help us ascertain reliably what violence is and what it is not? Or, can violence or nonviolence be ascertained with the help of certain behavioural traits so that we can trace successfully its motivating factors operating in the interior of man? And, more importantly, if we knew what distinguishes violence from other behavioural traits, will it suffice for us to control it and replace it by nonviolent disposition? That is to say, is the knowledge of what virtue is, enough for us to have virtue? Needless to say that we must make a distinction, in this regard, between knowing virtue and having virtue. The difficulties inherent in defining *ahimsa* lie in the fact that, to take just one example, it is very difficult to differentiate between acts that are manifestly violent and that are substantively nonviolent and vice versa.³

³A professor of philosophy seeking to define the Gandhian concept of *ahimsa* was perplexed because of this.

Given the difficulty of defining *ahimsa* in a way that takes care of this knotty problem, it is quite obvious that even the concept of structural violence does not help since it does not point to those dispositions, orientations and attitudes that, when institutionalized, give rise to structural violence. This is so for the simple reason that what is visible or easily identifiable, because it forms a part of the manifest world, is the expression of what is buried deep in the psyche of the individual and is not, therefore, easily discernable. Similarly, when Aristotle defines nonviolence as refraining from silencing anybody by force, it does not help us at all. The difficulties involved with this definition are, first, that it again diverts our attention from what is un-manifest to what is manifest. The reason for this is very simple. Aristotle, just like his intellectual mentor Plato, treats the public realm as that which instils in the individual the virtue of transcending the limitations of his contingent experiences, formed by his groundedness in nature. This transcendence helps him in relating himself to a larger order.

In short, Aristotle holds that participation in public affairs transforms the individual from an *idion* (private) into a *koinon* (communitarian). He argues that men form and reveal who they are in action and speech. "...in acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal propensities" (Arendt 1959, p. 139). The disclosure of who man is occurs through speech and action; it comes to the fore when a person is with others, and neither for nor against them—that is, in sheer human togetherness which is informed by persuasion and nonviolence.⁴ Speech and action are modes of *vita activa* and the polis, the political space, is the locus of *vita activa*.

The polis, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be (Arendt 1959, p. 177).

The important question is, however, how the phenomenon of human togetherness is created and sustained in the flux of time. This is the question which Aristotle fails to answer. Moreover, he excludes the family and the local community as incapable of creating and sustaining the phenomenon of togetherness because he considers them as real as instruments of reasoning. By excluding them from the ken of this question, Aristotle has nothing to fall back upon than the public realm which does not necessarily create human togetherness, except in the physical sense; this phenomenon constitutes the arena where it may be displayed or may not. Aristotle commits the error of identifying the family and the local community as nothing more than a domain of necessity and, therefore, a domain where instrumental reasoning prevails. This prevents him from realizing the importance these have as the primary sources of socialization in values that contribute to the reconciliation of *idion* and *koinon*, that is, the private and the public dimensions of the individual existence. The growing cleavage, between the private and the public is the prime factor behind

⁴This theme has been extensively dealt with by Jürgen Habermas. See Habermas (1979).

the establishment of the State as the substitute of the rule of law. And, as such, the ineffectiveness of the state itself in checking violence needs to be explained.

This is a significant pointer that should lead us to the understanding that the determination of what is violence and what is not, requires us to focus on more than just what is happening externally; it requires us to take a deeper look, a look into man's interior so as to ascertain how it is formed. The essential make-up of man's interior must then be related to the external in order to gain a reliable comprehension of the phenomenon of violence. It is in this context that we can appreciate the distinction that Jainism makes between *bhava himsa* and *dravya himsa*. *Dravya himsa* or violence done to objects or beings in the external world is directly related to *bhava himsa*, which signifies and symptomatizes distortions in orientation, which one projects onto the external world. This distortion is termed by Jainism as *pramada*, that is, wrong attitude towards life. As Pande (1984, p. 35) puts it:

Himsa (violence), the root evil, has two parts, viz., the presence of *pramada*, or wrong attitude and the infliction of injury to life. Egoistic passions are inherently other-disregarding and constitute *bhava himsa*. The infliction of injury positively as *aghata* or negatively as *pratibandha* (restraint), or any aspect of vital activity, physical, vocal or mental or breathing, etc. constitute *dravya himsa*.

It is under the influence of *pramada* that the individual becomes dead to the well-being of others. He is completely drained of the awareness central to the soul in its pure condition that all living creatures experience to a greater or lesser degree. As a result, he becomes immune to the desire for friendship (*eros*, love) with all creatures. *Pramada* is the consequence of forgetting who one really is, that is, the forgetting of the fact that the soul is pure intelligence and is above the fluctuations of the phenomenal world. All actions that originate in self-forgetting are injurious to others because they are self-regarding and other disregarding. They are symptomatic of the self-aggrandizing tendency of the individual and spring from *bhava himsa*. And since *bhava himsa* is the cause of moral degeneration, repeated recourse to it leads to the break down and corruption of social order as a moral association. When social order loses its status as a moral association, it becomes sick, and a sick society does not allow the individual to prevent or redeem his soul from corruption.

There is thus a definite connection between man's interior and his acts in the external world. As such, it is necessary to discuss: (a) how *pramada* is caused; (b) what happens when it becomes widespread and gets institutionalized and reinforced; and (c) how it has spread in modern times and with what consequences. The prevalence of *pramada* on a very large scale in modern times is the result of a radical change in the way we think, and the way in which we look at things. Our thought-ways and work-ways reflect, in a very large measure, what we referred to earlier as *kamachara* or man becoming the slave of many mad masters [*Republic* (Rep. 329c)]. Such a person, as the *Chhandodya Upanishad* notes, becomes *anyarat*, that is, someone who is ruled by others. Here the ruler is not something or somebody external to the person: the ruler is a part of his own being and dwells

within him. In any case, by becoming an *anyarat*, he has lost his status as a *swarat* (self-sovereign or in Socrates's words *autarch*). It is this tendency of man to surrender his status as *swarat* that induces *pramada* or nescience, so much so that he forgets his own true nature and his place and status in the world. As a consequence, he works under a false notion of himself and his relationship with the world. It is this *pramada* or nescience that all traditional thought-ways identify as the root cause of evil, out of which arises the motivation of acquiring more and more worldly goods. This is what breeds the tendency of what Aristotle calls *pleonexia* (self-aggrandizement) and what the Indian traditions of thought call *matsyanyaya* (the law of the shark). As a consequence, violence, both at the individual and collective levels, becomes deep-rooted and pervasive. To extricate man from his continuous sinking into the barbaric slime of cupidity is the avowed goal of all traditional thought.

Extrication of man from the web of worldly allurements has traditionally been considered to be the highest spiritual goal that each one of us must pursue. To aim at this goal implies embracing a two-tier view of man's life purposes. Every traditional world view posits this two-tier view: One, the higher life purpose, that is, the quest of self-knowledge or good citizenship or something culturally and spiritually elevating and, the other, the fulfilment of ordinary life needs like the acquisition of wealth, power and prestige. Traditional ways of thinking, in most parts of the world, treated both these purposes as equally necessary. However, they were also alive to the danger of falling into the single-minded pursuit of ordinary life needs and warned man of this danger. As a consequence of this, they treated the fulfilment of ordinary life needs as only infra-structural and as subordinate to and to be governed by the value of higher life purpose. As a matter of fact, they considered life without a higher life purpose to be a desert and equivalent to the life of a beast that knows only to go on appeasing his appetites.

But all this was to change in the seventeenth century when there occurred a radical shift in world view. The consequence of this change was the banishment of God from his own creation; the world was thus "de-divinized". It was this de-divinization that Weber (1960) identified as the beginning of the age of disenchantment, the evaporation of the mystery surrounding the cosmos. This disenchantment left man alone in this world, without any viable means of knowing it or solving the problems of his existence. His existence now came to be constituted by his desires and his capacity to reason, which he now used to satisfy his desires. The satisfaction of desires constituted for him his felicity now. As Hobbes (1956) observed long ago, there is no *summum bonum*, no ultimate aim in man's life; there is only felicity which consists in satisfying one desire after another without ceasing.

Going beyond Hobbes, Giambattista Vico identified the satisfaction of desires as being of central importance in the self-making of man (see Bergin and Fisch 1948). The need to satisfy desires forces man to interact with nature, which he does with the help of technology. As a result of this interaction, needs multiply; this makes further advances on the technological front necessary; these advancements lead to further proliferation of needs, which in turn leads to further

technological advances, and so on ad infinitum. This establishes a dynamic relationship between need fulfilment and technological advancement, initiating an open-ended process in which, as Wolin (1987) argues, needs become endless in two important senses: One, they get separated and finally divorced from a higher life purpose and become the ground in their own legitimization and, two, they proliferate endlessly. In this regard Rousseau once said that the fulfilment of biological needs is itself a great moral aspiration. There has come about in modern times, a fusion between material need fulfilment and morality, a fusion which is contrary to the hierarchical ordering that constituted the traditional world view (on this point, see Taylor 1981).

Desire now occupies the centre-stage of man's life and is the only dynamic element in the world; the individual as the centre of energy and enterprise serves collective well-being by securing his own happiness. Individuals are to be considered self-complete and separate from each other. They act in their own interest since they cannot do otherwise; they do not and cannot have knowledge of the consequences, whether good or bad, that their actions are likely to have for others. It is natural and rational for the individual to pursue his own interest, unconcerned with what happens to others; it is natural because his desires have been endowed to him by nature; it is rational not only because the satisfaction of desires will ensure his happiness but also because if he does not look after his own interests, nobody else will. Implicit in this perspective is the view that there exists a natural harmony, or at least the possibility of evolution of such harmony, in myriad diverse interests. Even if something defers this harmony from emerging, the Invisible Hand that squares up tensions and introduces compatibility between interests being pursued by a large number of people, is always present. However, experience shows that this Invisible Hand frequently gets enfeebled, falters and fails.

The radical change in world view, the change that underlies and gives a definite shape to human existence today, has made the quest for felicity the main objective in man's life. The centrality of this quest is a clear indication of the fact that there is no longer anything more valuable than the life of passion. When a life of passion becomes the sole objective, certain malign consequences, both for the individual and the collectivity he forms a part of, follow naturally and unavoidably. A life given simply to the fulfilment of ordinary life needs, involved in production and reproduction, can have only pleasure as its end. Such a life is irrational because it does not respond to, or even accept the claim of certain rationally determined ends. Rationality here does not mean "calculative reasoning" but *prajnana* or *sophia*. According to this view, when pleasure in the material sense becomes the end of life, it induces a pattern of life that, to use Cooper's term, is open-ended. It means that:

...it bids us maximize in our lives as a whole the amount of certain good, but without specifying at all what this maximum may be. It leaves it entirely to us, in principle at any rate, to alter our mode of life in adjustment of changing circumstances and altered capacities for enjoyment as our lives themselves develop. There are no fixed principles of living, though, of course, there may be a variety of summary rules recording our own or others'

experience of the common situation of life and the pleasure or pain that usually issues from various courses of action takes in them. Such rules are only rules of thumb, however, and not fixed principles... (Cooper 1975, p. 83).

Significant in this perspective is the fact that in the absence of fixed principles deviation from past ways of thinking and doing things becomes easier. Also, striking out on one's own, if it proves to yield greater pleasure, it becomes a natural mode of action. It is therefore not surprising that modernization has been defined by Unger as the constant breaking of habitual modes of thinking and acting. Once traditional constraints on action, particularly action aimed at gaining pleasure, are lifted, man reverts to his natural condition; and natural man is spiritually blind. The centrality of the need to satisfy desires as a means not only of securing felicity, but also of personality development and civilizational progress, presupposes a particular account of human nature "in which actions are the expression of, or are caused by, desires, and according to which, chains of practical reasoning always terminate in some "'I want' or 'It pleases me'" (McIntyre 1988, p. 21). What is also distinctive about this perspective is that the translation of this expression into reality, into the salubrious management of man's pragmatic affairs is not possible unless, as Hobbes (1956, p. 76) underscores, one has power not only to retain what one has but also to gain what one wants, even if it becomes incompatible with similar attempts by others. Thus, one must create, acquire or mobilize power resources for satisfying one's desires. And power, in this perspective, signifies nothing more than bending others to one's own will in order to realize one's self-defined purposes (Weber 1960).⁵

The play of power is enacted in a social environment in which human ends are multitudinous and limitless, but it is characterized, at the same time, by the scarcity of means to satisfy these ends (Unger 1975, p. 65). This situation reduces humans to a highly competitive and potentially violent race. Central to this state of affairs is the strategic importance of the exercise of individual freedom, both for determining one's purposes and for realizing them. But the realization of self-defined purposes requires the conversion of freedom into power. And since everyone is engaged in the same enterprise, social life and relations become intensely competitive; individuals and diverse socio-economic interests vie with each other for articulation, ascendance, and control. To win in a situation of scarcity, it becomes important to ensure privileged access and control over strategic societal resources by the use of superior power. No wonder efficacy in performing the entrepreneurial tasks of transforming society and nature, in provisioning and in laying a firm foundation for the good life of modern conception, are the basic factors that form and sustain the modern identity of man (Taylor 1981).

Efficacy, in this perspective, means ensuring privileged access to, and control over, scarce societal resources in relation to others or, as Mahatma Gandhi (1969, pp. 8–9)

⁵"Power (*macht*) is a probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests" (Weber 1960, p. 162).

notes, establishing maximum inequality in one's own favour. Taking note of the unrestrained tendency of man in modern times to acquire more and more worldly goods, Dewey (1962, p. 116) characterized modern man not in the Cartesian sense of *cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) but in terms of "I own, therefore I am". That is to say, his character is no longer shaped by the idea of who he substantively is, but by what he possesses in terms of worldly goods. It is in this sense that man, as Wood (1972, p. 100) observes, has become an externalized creature, nothing more than a bundle of interests which cannot be realized without always looking outward and interacting with the external world. The transformation of man into an externalized creature has certain ramifications both for himself and the collectivity he is a part of. As an externalized creature a person comes to live what Aristotle calls an *apaulistic* life, a life given to hedonistic indulgence, given solely to the pursuit of pleasure. Living an *apaulistic* life, man becomes like a vessel full of holes. No matter how much and how long one fills such a vessel with water, it remains empty. No matter how many desires man satisfies, satisfaction always eludes him. Such a person is like a loathsome bird that, as Plato remarks, excretes as rapidly as it eats, and is constantly doing both.

A person bewitched by the pleasure gained through the senses, is accustomed only to hate and fear, and shun[s] that which is hidden from his eyes [and has] to be grasped only by the intelligence and by philosophy...." (in Bluck 1955, p. 80). One of the entities hidden in his interior is the soul, which happens to be the seat and sensorium of divine. It is by virtue of this that the soul is considered to be the ruler of man's interior, providing him proper guidance to chart out a safe course in the seething and turbulent sea of life. But when the soul's rule ends, passions become rebellious and take over the function of ruling. Submission to appetites signifies, as Nussbaum (1986, p. 137) puts it, changeability of the soul:

A soul kept in such a way is at the mercy of any ruler. Such a soul can quickly change its course in obedience to new mastering desires. And because its desire leads it, so frequently, to attend to vulnerable things it can too rapidly be stripped of what it really values.

When the soul is deprived of what it really values, it loses what Theodore Lowi calls auto-control. With the loss of auto-control, it becomes extremely difficult to make a distinction between what is right and what is wrong. It reinforces what Rousseau calls self-love, and in the rising tide of self-love moral sensibility is drowned. This is so for the simple reason that satisfying desires is, as already pointed out, both natural and rational; scarcity accentuates competition for privileged access to and control over societal resources; this, in turn, lifts all restraints on acquisitive tendency and promotes the attitude of "beggar thy neighbor".⁶ Reason is supposed to exercise effective check on the depredations of rebellious desires. However, rationality in modern times signifies only calculative, prudential and instrumental reasoning. When the soul is under the rule of passions, reason becomes cramped and deformed; it then ceases its search for the true and the

⁶For a useful discussion, see Hirsch (1977, ch. 1).

good; it is, as Plato points out, wholly consumed in *Logezimenos*, that is calculation (*Republic* 366a, pp. 6–7), or what economists call cost-and-benefit analysis. And since rationalism does not recognize any authority beyond itself and does not allow the divine to influence its working, it leads to what Dobbs (1987) calls “rational commensuration.” It is not surprising, therefore, that reason which was supposed to control the excesses of the pursuit of self-interest, has been reduced in modern times to the lowly status of the hand-maiden of desires.

The evisceration of moral sense is thus the direct consequence of cupidity. This is symptomatic, as Aristotle underlines, of the zeal for life, but not for good life (*Nichomachean Ethics*, 1257b 41, see Cooper 1975); “good life” is to be understood in the traditional sense, that is, a life ruled and disciplined by morality. The zeal for life is marked, as Hobbes (1956, p. 64) observed, by a perpetual and restless desire of power after power. This restless desire transforms a people into a multitude of separate men who cannot be said to form a community, but only an open field of power drives, in competition with each other. The original drive of power, Hobbes further observes, is aggravated by diffidence of the competitor and by the lust of glory in successfully outstripping the other man (p. 81). In the race of life we must strive to have no other goal, no other garland, but being foremost. In this race “continually to be outgone is misery, continually to outgo felicity. And to forsake the course is to die” (Hobbes 1978, p. 491).

Since Hobbes does not recognize, as do most of political thinkers subsequently, the sources of order to lie in the soul as the reigning principle, inspiration can be exercised only by passion that is even stronger than the pride to be a paraclete and that is the fear of death. Death is the greatest evil (*summum malum*), and if life cannot be ordered through orientation towards a *summum bonum*, order will have to be motivated by the fear of *summum mallum* (Hobbes 1956, p. 113). Out of mutual fear is born the willingness to submit to government by contract; when the contracting parties agree to have a government, they “confer their power and strength upon one man, or assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, the plurality of voices, unto one will” (p. 112). This reduction of the plurality of voices into one will, however, fails to sustain order even though it can create one. The creation of public order on the basis of the collectivization of individual wills is undertaken to check the depredations of desires and to protect the weak from the ambition of the strong. An artificially created public order does not and cannot concern itself with legislating or regulating desires; it must only take them as given. As such, it can only hope to take care of the adverse consequences of actions by individuals and groups (see Spragen Jr. 1981).

However, in this the State, as we shall see presently, fails miserably. As Freud puts it, man in modern times is like the modern State which is continuously confronted with the mob out on the street, destroying public property to get its demands met. The rebellion of the id which Freud talks about is a forceful pointer to the elimination of the *summum bonum* as the highest principle regulating and directing life activity. With this also disappears the source of order, both from individual and social lives, for order in the community rests on *homonoia*, that is, on the participation in the common *nous* or *xynon* (shareable commonality),

as Heraclitus calls it. And since the community of men formed by the creation of public order is reduced to a multitude, badly divided by cupidity, *homonoia* is disrupted. A society marked by multitudinous ends that are divorced from shareable commonality lack the conscious effort to nurture the sense of community comes to be marked by relations of hostility and collaboration. However, hostility and mutual dependence are based on the nature of human ends and on the scarcity of means to satisfy them (Unger 1975, p. 65). Concerned with the promotion of interests in a situation of hostility and collaboration, men enter into alliances which prove tentative, precarious and fragile (Ronen 1979).

We must underline the fact that modern age is the age of self-determination; it has witnessed the rise of self-defining subjects. Self-determination without the freedom to determine purpose and adopt ways and means to realize it is vacuous. The exercise of freedom signifies disengagement from the external world, with a wish to control it and bending it to one's own will, for serving one's own end. To exercise freedom is not only to de-socialize experience but also to discard old roots, tradition and all that the past signifies, and to look to the future for perfection. The self imagined in modern consciousness is not an accomplished fact, but only an alluring, shimmering possibility which can be actualized only by removing, wilfully and resolutely, all obstacles and hurdles erected by society, its conventions and contrivances. As Marx observes:

All fixed, fast, frozen relations with their ancient and vulnerable prejudices and opinions are swept away, all new forms become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with his sober senses his real condition of life and his relations with his kind (Marx 1977, p. 38).

The sober senses that Marx talks of are usually guided by self-love. Predominance of self-love propels men to exercise freedom by removing obstacles to untrammelled action and resisting external pleasure, oppressive and “inauthentic” aspirations imposed by society (Taylor 1979, p. 157; Unger 1986, esp. Intro.). The self that sees freedom in setting aside all external obstacles and impediments is characterless, however much it may be couched in glowing terms like “rationality” and “creativity”. Such a self, treats the world as mirror of itself; the world is seen to exist to fulfil the self. Meanings in the world become psychomorphic, the sense of meaningful and impersonal life disappears. As Sennet (1977, pp. 176–177) points out:

There are no human objects or human relations with a reality all their own. The peculiarity and the destructiveness of this narcissistic vision is that the more the environment of the human being is judged in terms of its congruence with or subservience to self-needs, the less fulfilling it becomes. For the very reason that expectations of fulfillment are at once so vast and amorphous, the possibilities of fulfillment are diminished. Because there are no boundaries between self and other, experiences lose their form. They never seem to have an end or definition of completion.

The self that Sennet and others describe is, in effect, protean—always in the making, always making demands on the external world and becoming aggressive when frustrated or hampered in getting what it wants. Out of frustration or because

of stiff resistance the “I” of modern times, makes alliances with others and is thus transformed into “we”. But every “we” that is formed has its own counterpart in a “they”. The division of the multitude that modern society is, in “we” and “they”, transforms politics into a process of reciprocal resistance, politicizes traditional socio-cultural referents of identity formation, and initiates a process of war of one against all. Violence is born precisely out of this state of affairs. Thus, there is a direct relationship between the “rebellion of id” and violence. Freud talks of the need of a “superior element” to pacify and curb the unruly “mob of desires”. But the superior element that tradition identified as the soul is in banishment. As a result, only the State, ushering in the rule of law to maintain order can be relied upon. However, as we have already suggested, both prove to be ineffective.

The State in modern times is considered to be a providential check on human cupidity, as well as a means of protecting the weak from the strong. But like the Olympian gods, the State is supposed to be above the flux of social life and relations; however, it displays passions just as the Olympian gods did and gets involved in human affairs. As such, it proves a weapon in the hands of the strong to keep the weak out of the heaven of the good life that the modern times are trying to establish on this earth. The State is defined by Max Weber as the authority that enjoys monopoly over the means of violence. However, this monopoly has been seriously challenged by the three types of weapons identified by Raymond Aron—the sub-machine gun, the tank and the atom bomb. These weapons are supposed to be the means of bringing about change in a situation where the *status quo* has grown oppressive. Aron (1968) further observes that an order of some kind continues to emerge as a result of the dialectic interplay between these three weapons. This, in turn, has brought about changes. According to this view, the sub-machine gun represents guerrilla warfare, the tank the struggle for power between two or more States, and the atom bomb stands as the surrogate of catastrophe, the ultimate weapon to impose a particular image of reality on the recalcitrant and apparently impermeable *status quo*, representing a malign configuration of adverse socio-political forces.

If Aron is correct in his analysis, it is quite evident that there exists a paradoxical situation which defies all efforts at rectification. The very emergence of different kinds of weapons as harbingers of liberation from oppressive *status quo* is indicative of the growing feebleness of the mighty state as the protector and promoter of human welfare, or as the providential check on man’s cupidity. The State as the centralized political authority endowed with immense power is now confronted with growing difficulties in safeguarding its authority. The sub-machine gun has effectively challenged and thrown into doubt the State’s legitimacy. And this has happened at a time when the State has gradually acquired monopoly over more and more spheres of political life. As a result, too much power has come to be concentrated in only a few selected institutions and is available for use only by a few persons.

Existing along with the growing debility of the state system is the feebleness of the rule of laws. Paradoxically, while attempts are made to improve the machinery of the rule of law to make it more efficacious, it develops new points of strain.

Needless to say that the rule of law represents a serious institutionalized effort and is based on a trans-individual perspective that is universal, so as to rid the political system of arbitrary rule. However, law itself represents in modern times an outcome of the will; and the will can be changed frequently. As such, law-making becomes subservient to power game. Furthermore, law is ineffective if it does not evoke respect for itself in the minds of the people. But since the pursuit of interests makes people blind to finer things, rationality induces only rational commensuration, or calculation of costs and benefits that come out of disobeying the law. That is why it is said that man is corrupt not because he is irrational, but because he is rational.

The growing feebleness of the rule of law is indicative of its inability to give satisfaction to various socio-economic interests. Accumulated resentment breeds violence, especially when the normal procedures of resolving differences and conflicts prove ineffective and therefore futile. And as this consciousness takes firm roots, disrespect for law aggravates. It is in this situation that cupidity can be controlled by morality but, as Aristotle points out, “it is not possible to be a morally good person, in the strict sense, without practical intelligence, nor practically intelligent without moral virtue” (NE 1144b, 31–32, see Cooper 1975). How to break this vicious circle is the problem all of us must concern ourselves with.

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