

What is Violence?

Violence is commonly understood as physical injury.

You can have violent emotions - they endanger you and make it possible for you to wilfully harm others.

The Oxford English Dictionary states that "forcibly interfering with personal freedom" is violence. Robert McAfee Brown understands violence not just as direct violence but the less obvious forms of violence such as not giving the people proper care in hospitals. He sees it as anything that degrades a person. It is a "violation of personhood." The more depersonalising an action is the more violent it is. Jacques Ellul states that violence may take only the form of psychological violence or spiritual violence. An example would be when a pope is threatened by the Church doctrine that he risks hellfire if he changes harmful Catholic doctrine. Ellul sees violence that is about inculcating a servile attitude towards authority as the worst form of violence.

Praying for enemies is asking God to change them. That is actually violent. Would it not be better for you to mix with them as much as you can in a harmless way so that you might win them over by your patience and goodness as a person?

The subordination of women to men is rightly seen by feminists as violence. Discrimination is inherently violent. The suppression of women is implicit violence at best.

God is said to be perfectly good and infinitely good. He is good beyond measure. Thus sin is a serious matter for it is so insulting to such infinite goodness. The person who does not care if others sin does not love or appreciate God or his goodness. He is bad himself. So religion says you must hate sin and want to hurt it. You must be violent towards the sin not the sinner. But you are personifying the sin and hating it so you might as well hate the person. Moral codes lead to violence. We must, if we need one, use a code that has minimal rules and which is atheistic. Better to hate evil doing greatly as an atheist than to have to hate it even more because you are a lover of God!

Moral codes are inherently violent for they want people to suffer for violating them to the degree that they wilfully broke the rules. If a child is not made to suffer for neglecting homework then the school then cannot say it is the rule that the homework has to be done. The inherent violence is why a dictatorship of liberalism (true liberalism drops rules that can be done without and simplifies as much as possible) is better than any other kind. At least the liberals alone try to contain and reduce the violence. The inherent violence of moral codes is one reason why humanism though imperfect is a wiser option than religion. And humanism is not arrogantly saying that a God who is infinite in all perfections sanctions its moral codes. A moral code should be seen as a necessary evil not as something to be celebrated as the will of God! And humanism does not worship man-gods who got angry - therefore who fuelled the fires of violence - and who wreck temples as paragons of good behaviour.

Anything other than the principle, "Do not try to change others. Relating to others is always giving them opportunities. Give them the reason and chance to think about self-motivating themselves to change" is violence.

We cannot create a respecting society unless we address structural violence and then direct violence. Structural violence loves to hide itself and does its evil slowly and bites when you least expect. It is the sea direct violence swims in which is why it must be tackled first.