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Introduction

One always hopes that the timely character of the topics that one chooses to examine would be revealed to oneself, to one's peers, and to the general audience at least at the end of the research. Occasionally, the timeliness of a topic is immediately clear from the very beginning of the journey. The importance of the questions that this edited volume aims to tackle and answer were clear from the outset, though somewhat unexpectedly in a most unfortunate manner.

This edited volume emerged from the conference *Historical, Philosophical and Theological Perspectives on Political Violence* held by the Center of Excellence of Law, Identity and the European Narratives at the University of Helsinki in spring 2022.¹ The volume delves deep into the complex and multifaceted topic of political violence. The timely nature of the chosen topic became immediately apparent, as the world witnessed the unfolding tragedy of Russia's war on Ukraine and the more recent robust and violent escalation of the war in Gaza. This grim contemporary manifestation of political violence served as a stark reminder of the enduring presence of violence in our world, both historically and in the present day.

The volume comprises thirteen chapters that originated from presentations at the conference, where scholars and experts from various academic fields came together to discuss the nature and aspects of political violence. In them, the authors aim to scrutinize and delineate the discussion on political violence by exploring its historical and contemporary forms, characteristics, and justifications within the context of the development of European identity and ideas of Europe. The fundamental questions of what constitutes political violence and aggression, when it can be deemed justified, who holds the right to exercise it, and against whom it can be directed, are explored from multiple perspectives.

Answers to these questions are complex and varied, influenced by factors such as ends, available resources, historical and socioeconomic context, and the ideological, political, and religio-theological backgrounds of the actors involved. The phenomenon of political violence can be approached from different disciplines such as political science, law, history of ideas, philosophy, and theology, each offering unique insights into the subject. In the volume, we seek to provide a

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multidisciplinary examination and critical appraisal of central questions surrounding political violence. By incorporating various perspectives, our aim is to shed light on the complexities of the phenomenon and offer tools to understand the different aspects of political violence that may remain obscured when viewed from a single standpoint. The interplay between concepts, historical context, and moral ideas is crucial in understanding the complexities of political violence and its impact on European identity.

Rather than focusing solely on concrete instances of political violence (for example, war, civic strife, political repression, revolutionary actions) in this volume, we delve into how these questions have been addressed in European political, philosophical, and theological thought.² The authors explore the intellectual tools, forms of justification, and ideological currents that have shaped the idea and use of political violence throughout history. The aftermath of the two world wars in the twentieth century played a significant role in shaping contemporary European political identity and perceptions of political violence, leading to an ongoing dialogue between the practice of violence and a human rights-based morality.

The volume is divided into four sections, each of which gathers chapters by experts in various fields of inquiry and study – which highlights the importance of considering multiple perspectives to understand the complex nature of political violence. By examining its historical, philosophical, and theological dimensions, the authors offer a nuanced view into the evolving concept of political violence and its implications for European identity. The chapters contained within the volume serve as a witness to the significance of a multidisciplinary approach to political violence, emphasizing the need to consider diverse viewpoints to gain a comprehensive understanding of this pervasive and enduring issue.

The first three chapters (Section I) approach the question of political violence through intellectual historical lenses, concepts central to its analysis (enemy, human dignity, just war), and their emergence and development in Western thought. The nature of political violence is understood and its justification is developed within a complicated context of intersected conceptualities which provide the framework in and from which it is constituted.

² For illuminating studies which examine political violence from a historical, geographical, political, and empirical point of views see Donald Bloxham and Robert Gerwarth, eds., *Political Violence in Twentieth-century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Jean Elizabeth Rosenfeld, ed., *Terrorism, Identity and Legitimacy: the Four Waves Theory and Political Violence* (Aldershot: Routledge, 2011); Marie Breen-Smyth, ed., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Political Violence* (London: Routledge, 2016). For a reflective ethical analysis of political violence, focusing especially on war and the problem of just war, see C.A.J. Coady, *Morality and Political Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

In Chapter 1, Martino Tognocchi explores the intricate concepts of *enemy* and *enmity*. While the idea of an enemy is crucial to understanding political violence, particularly in the case of war, its definition is not as clear-cut as it may initially seem. The enemy serves as a prerequisite in theories of war, aiding in the establishment of boundaries and criteria for the justified use of violence in pursuit of specific political goals. Tognocchi explores the concept of the enemy within the framework of civil war, a topic that has not received as much attention in contemporary political theory compared to other types of violence. By referencing the theories of civil strife proposed by early modern thinkers Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), Tognocchi pushes back against any simple interpretation of enmity. He demonstrates that within the context of civil war, the concept of the enemy becomes entangled in a complex dichotomy between forms of political violence that are deemed both legitimate and illegitimate. This tension underscores the complicated nature of the enemy in the context of civil strife, revealing the challenges inherent in grappling with the complexities of enmity within the realm of political theory.

Several authors analyze totalitarian violence from both theoretical and historical perspectives. In Chapter 2, Kauis Tuori delves into the question whether totalitarian violence possesses unique qualities, and he explores the emergence of the concept of *human dignity* as a powerful response to the dehumanizing ideologies and practices of the totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century. These oppressive regimes were known for their brutal and indiscriminate use of violence, targeting individuals who they saw as devoid of any moral value. Tuori demonstrates how, amid the debates of the 1930s and 1940s, a new understanding of human dignity began to take shape. Drawing on established traditions to critique and restrain the excessive violence prevalent in society, a notion of human dignity emerged as a crucial counterforce to the oppressive ideologies of European totalitarianism. This concept of human dignity, coupled with the burgeoning discourse on human rights, served as a moral compass in the face of repressive and violent regimes. Through Tuori's exploration, we come to understand the significance of human dignity as a revolutionary idea that challenged the dehumanizing practices of totalitarian regimes. By highlighting the importance of respecting the inherent value and equality of all individuals, the concept of human dignity played a pivotal role in shaping the conceptualization of a more just and humane society in the aftermath of the atrocities of the twentieth century.

Examining European thought on political violence involves analyzing the secularization of political and legal language, as well as the enduring influence of theological perspectives in political theory. Tamas Nyirkos delves in Chapter 3 into the concept of *just war* within European Christian thought. Nyirkos examines how this concept is both contested and deemed relevant in modern times, includ-

ing its recent use by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (2020). Nyirkos charts the evolution of Christian just war theory from its roots in the thought of Saint Augustine (354–430) to its dismissal by Pope Francis. However, Nyirkos argues that just war theories are not simply outdated checklists used to justify acts of violence in politics. Instead, they may serve both as a means of conceptualizing reality and as resources to reflect on the justification for war and political violence based on principles of justice and nonviolence, while acknowledging the inevitability of conflict in human affairs. Nyirkos proposes that despite criticisms of its outdated nature, the language of just war theory can still be valuable in conveying moral arguments. It is not just a relic to be discarded, but a tool for contemplating the complexities of warfare and violence in a world striving for justice and peace. In a time when political violence continues to challenge ethical boundaries, the examination of historical frameworks like just war theory can offer insights into the ethical dilemmas contemporary societies face.

The authors in Section II consider the difficult issues of pacifism, its philosophical and moral grounds and its complicated relation to the question of political violence, and how to define when the use of violence for political ends becomes justified and where the limits lie, in cases where either the end could arguably be considered as morally legitimate (self-defense, societal change etc.) or this conceptual border is unclear and creates gray areas in practice. Few stances vis-à-vis political violence, are perhaps ascribed a more obvious moral character than civil disobedience. In Chapter 4, Willian E. Scheuerman takes a fresh look at the stance Dr. Martin Luther King (1929–1968) took on the right to self-defense. Scheuerman argues that King viewed violence as a moral evil and pushed back against the idea that violent self-defense against state violence could be legitimate under certain circumstances. While acknowledging that self-defense can be a legal and moral right for individuals, King believed that the ultimate goal and basis for any meaningful political endeavor should be commitment to nonviolence. In choosing nonviolence as a guiding principle, King believed that individuals and societies could break free from this destructive cycle and work toward genuine peace and justice. In this way, King's approach to political violence was not simply about legal or individual rights, but about the moral imperative to resist violence in all its forms. Scheuerman's analysis highlights the moral complexity of the issue of political violence, particularly in the context of civil disobedience. By examining King's views on self-defense and nonviolence, Scheuerman sheds light on the deeper ethical considerations at play when grappling with the use of violence to pursue political goals.

The conception that philosophical and theoretical analysis of political violence may be divorced from its practical forms is challenged by Przemyslaw Tacik. In Chapter 5, Tacik argues that theoretical reflection and practical realities

of political violence and its legal justification are mutually conditioning and interdependent. Tacik aims to demonstrate how the state of exception paradigm enriches our understanding of political violence. By focusing on self-determination conflicts, Tacik highlights a specific type of political violence at the intersection of international law and international relations. He suggests that these conflicts operate within a state of exception in international law, allowing for violence while also incorporating it into legal frameworks. This creates a complex dynamic where political violence exists in a gray area, not completely accepted, or rejected by legal systems. Tacik draws on the works of philosophers such as Hobbes, Carl Schmitt (1888–1985), Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) and Giorgio Agamben to support his analysis. These thinkers provide intellectual foundations for understanding the role of violence in political conflicts and the complex relationship between law and violence. Tacik emphasizes that both theoretical concepts and practical realities need to be considered when analyzing political violence. He explores the nuances of the state of exception paradigm to shed light on the complexities of violence in contemporary political contexts.

In his analysis in Chapter 6, Spartaco Pupo highlights the importance of understanding the intellectual and philosophical foundations of nonviolence. He delves into the works of Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), Karl Popper (1902–1994), and Michael Oakeshott (1901–1990) to uncover the skeptical and antidogmatic philosophies that underpin their thinking, suggesting that these can provide a solid theoretical basis for advocating peaceful political discourse and action. Pupo challenges us to move beyond a surface-level appreciation of nonviolence and consider the deeper philosophical grounds that support it. By investigating the ideas of these three prominent European thinkers, he encourages us to reflect on the need for a nuanced understanding of nonviolent political thought. Russell, Popper, and Oakeshott each offer unique perspectives on skepticism and anti-dogmatism, which Pupo suggests can inform our approach to nonviolence. By engaging with their ideas, we can enrich our understanding of the complexities of peaceful political action and discourse.

In Section III, the authors critically elucidate important intellectual, philosophical, and theological sources that have influenced contemporary European political thought and consequently our understanding the political, power, sovereignty, ideological thinking, and political violence. How are we to understand theological associations in thinking about political violence? Are they simply something to criticize, superfluous or even dangerous for the argument, or may they indeed at times be indispensable to the case made? The associations between theology and political violence is a complex and contentious issue that requires careful consideration. While some may view theology as unnecessary or even dangerous in discussions of political violence, it may be indispensable in certain

contexts. In Chapter 7, Aaron James Goldman challenges the interpretation of *Fear and Trembling* (1843) by Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), which has been used to justify various forms of violence. Especially, Goldman criticizes those readings of *Fear and Trembling* which take Kierkegaard’s famous “teleological suspension of the ethical” as a tool for justifying political violence, while simultaneously providing grounds for rejecting any ethical consideration of the possible legitimacy of such violence. At the center of Goldman’s analysis is Schmitt’s reading of Kierkegaard. Goldman defends Kierkegaard against those who see his philosophical and theological thought, especially his account of faith, as an important precursor to Schmittian decisionism. However, Goldman stresses that this interpretation overlooks the importance of faith in Kierkegaard’s philosophy. Goldman’s analysis suggests that while there may be similarities between the Kierkegaardian tragic hero and the Schmittian notion of sovereignty, faith plays a crucial role in distinguishing between the two. The Kierkegaardian tragic hero may capture something essential of Schmittian sovereignty, but faith is critical, and its champion rises above the political to consider it critically. This nuanced understanding of theological thinking sheds light on the complexities of philosophical and ethical discussions about political violence and highlights the importance of considering faith. Moreover, Goldman’s analysis challenges simplistic interpretations of Kierkegaard’s work and emphasizes the need for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the theological and the political.

Ville Suuronen examines in Chapter 8 the intricate web woven between violence, death, sovereignty, and European political thought in Western philosophy. He argues that a critical examination of this connection not only provides crucial insight into the complicated phenomenon of political violence, but also presents new opportunities to rethink the dynamics of political interactions. Suuronen draws an interesting contrast between the favorable view of Hanna Arendt (1906–1975) and opposing stance of Schmitt on how Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) scrutinizes the complex interplay between violence, death, and sovereignty in his political philosophy. Arendt saw in Spinoza a potential ally who offered a unique perspective on dismantling this intricate relationship, while Schmitt viewed him as an intellectual foe precisely because of this dismantlement. Arendt’s embrace of Spinoza’s ideas may be seen as suggesting a path toward transformation, while Schmitt’s rejection could be taken as signifying a desire to uphold more traditional power structures. Suuronen invites us to consider how philosophical concepts can shape political ideologies and actions, to offer insight into the complex tapestry of European political thought. In unpacking these connections, Suuronen prompts us to reflect on how violence, death, and sovereignty have historically intersected in political discourse, and how these dynamics continue to inform contemporary debates. By exploring the intellectual legacies of thinkers like Spi-

noza, Arendt, and Schmitt, Suuronen encourages us to contemplate the enduring relevance of philosophical inquiry in shaping our understanding of violence, power, and governance. Moreover, Suuronen aims to provide a framework for understanding both progressive and conservative political movements in twentieth century Europe.

Such a framework needs to consider the materiality and compensating logic of the practices of border walling and their central link to political violence. Piotr Sawczyński's examination of material bordering practices in relation to political violence in Chapter 9 makes a significant contribution to understanding the complexities of European political violence. He draws on Wendy Brown's theories of border walling as a means for sovereign power to maintain control and Benjamin's critique of misguided assumptions regarding sovereign power and revisits the concept of Schmittian decisionism. Sawczyński argues that political leadership in practice does not align with notions of power in theory. Sawczyński's exploration of border walling and political violence sheds light on the nuanced relationship between sovereignty, power, and violence in European contexts. He examines the materiality and compensating logic of border walling practices to offer a fresh perspective on the role of violence in European politics. He thus raises an important question about the historical fetishization of political violence in Europe and its implications for the continent's identity. Has violence become an inherent part of European identity, either affirmed or legitimized through historical practices? Sawczyński challenges readers to reconsider the assumptions underlying sovereign power and its relationship to violence. His chapter serves as a timely reminder of the complex dynamics at play in contemporary European political violence, and the need to critically reexamine established theories of power and leadership.

Intellectual sincerity requires that such a critical endeavor, when need be, tackle and challenge intellectual leadership. In his analysis of Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979) in Chapter 10, Olli-Pekka Vainio challenges the widely celebrated image of the eminent leftist thinker as a champion of antifascist and antitotalitarian ideals. Vainio suggests that a closer examination of Marcuse's ideas reveals a troubling possibility: that his own thought may inadvertently mirror the very forms of thinking he opposes. This criticism echoes previous assessments by Alasdair Macintyre and Leżsek Kołakowski (1927–2009), who also identified problematic aspects of Marcuse's thought. Vainio draws parallels between Marcuse's political philosophy and certain Christian and Gnostic doctrines deemed heretical in Christian history to raise concern about the underlying assumptions of Marcuse's thought. Drawing on insights from contemporary social psychology and cognitive science, he aims to show that Marcuse may inadvertently reinforce the very structures of thought he seeks to dismantle and risks a distorted reflection of the ideologies he seeks to combat. This critical reevaluation of Marcuse's legacy

invites us to consider the complexities and potential contradictions within his influential body of work in light of their unintended consequences. Vainio's analysis invites us to consider the intricate relationship between political philosophy and the perpetuation of oppressive structures. His critique reminds us of the importance of critical engagement and reflection in thinking of the political, political violence, and the pursuit of social transformation and justice.

The chapters of section IV further explore the underlying assumptions and frameworks that influence the justification of repressive power structures and the use of violence for political ends, particularly in the context of revolutionary action. The relationship between religio-theological principles and political ideologies, specifically regarding the issue of violence, was introduced in section II. Building on this discussion, the section delves deeper into the concept of theodict logic, highlighting the interconnected nature of moral, political, and theological perspectives and how they influence each other. The section illustrates how theodict reasoning was used to rationalize the violent acts of the French Revolution, offering a way to not only comprehend these events but also to ethically (and theologically) justify them. This challenging topic of justifying revolutionary actions is also explored via a more secular approach to examining the conditions under which revolutions, including the French Revolution, can be deemed legitimate.

Aleksei Rakhmanin, in Chapter 11, challenges the idea that political violence as such could be justified. Drawing inspiration from Albert Camus (1913–1960), particularly his work *The Plague* (1947), Rakhmanin examines violence and explores the possibility of politics devoid of the rationalization of violence. The justification of political violence is closely tied to the moral aspect of politics and is rooted in theodict reasoning prevalent in European metaphysical, moral, and political philosophy. Rakhmanin proposes the idea of stepping away from theodict tendencies ingrained within modern European intellectual tapestry. By doing so, he suggests that violence, be it political or otherwise, can be viewed without any inherent (cosmic, moral, political, or other) value. This fresh perspective allows for a more honest and critical appraisal of the nature of violence and its implications. Through analyzing Camus' work, Rakhmanin aims to combine both philosophical and literary insight into violence that is not clouded by metaphysical, moral, or ideological preconceptions. By separating violence from such background assumptions, he sheds light on the futility of violence as a means of achieving any meaningful (political) ends. Drawing from the antitheodict quarters of twentieth century thought, especially Camus, Rakhmanin calls for a reevaluation of how we perceive and confront violence, urging us to consider a more subtle approach that goes beyond traditional frameworks.

The theodist logic and framework serves not only to justify certain courses of political action, but also, and perhaps most often, to understand violence and what the inquirer perceives as unjust, evil political events in history. In Chapter 12, Marianne Sandelin investigates the complex thought of Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821), a French conservative and counterrevolutionary thinker, as he grappled with the tumultuous events of the French Revolution. Sandelin highlights Maistre’s unique perspective on the French Revolution, viewing it as a profoundly evil and unprecedented occurrence in history. As required by a theodist stance, rather than dismissing the violence and chaos as useless and absurd, Maistre turns to his theological beliefs to provide a deeper understanding and justification for the events of the French Revolution. Moreover, Sandelin’s analysis makes it clear that Maistre’s theodist thinking crucially shaped his political ideology. By interpreting the violence of the Revolution as a manifestation of divine providence, Maistre sought to reconcile the seemingly senseless brutality with his belief in a higher power governing the course of history. This blend of theological conviction with political analysis demonstrates how interconnected these two realms can be, and how a deeper understanding of one can shed light on the other. Sandelin thus offers an illuminating glimpse into how Maistre grapples with the complexities of political violence and divine intervention. Her analysis shows the intricate relationship between politics and theology and provides valuable insights into how theological beliefs can influence political thought and justification.

The French Revolution was a time of great upheaval and change, with many different perspectives on the role of violence in achieving revolutionary goals: not all theorists believed that violence was necessary or justified. Finally, in Chapter 13, Kontantinos Grigoriadis highlights the varying views on legitimate revolution, particularly in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Grigoriadis argues that Benjamin Constant (1767–1830) proposed a moderate perspective on the legitimacy of revolution. He believed that a revolution could only be considered justified, legitimate, and successful if it involved nonradical reform of society. Constant’s view centered on the idea that revolution should be a peaceful and gradual transformation, rather than a violent and drastic upheaval. Grigoriadis shows how Constant’s concept of nonradical reform involves replacing popular sovereignty with the notion of public opinion and establishing a “caste” of intellectuals. This reconfiguration of the idea of revolution, according to Grigoriadis, provides a way to avoid political violence in the name of the “people.”

The overall aim of this volume is to provide a multifaceted and pluralist take on the question of political violence. Instead of focusing on the canvassing of different instances and types of political violence, we have emphasized systematic elucidation of its nature. We have sought to draw the ever-unclear conceptual borders and limits of its justification and legitimate use and explain the conceptual frameworks which

constitute and constantly shape our understanding of political violence, its justification, and limit. While our general focus is on the context of European thought, political space, and identity, we endeavor toward a critical enterprise that acknowledges both the strengths of the resources in the European intellectual tradition and, especially, its weaknesses and often myopic character.

Therefore, it is important to ask: whose perspective do we take on political violence? As said, it is important to contextualize theories, and the authors in this volume focus on contextualizing European thought about political violence as exactly that: European. The chapters paint a picture of European thought as to some extent perhaps even obsessed with political violence. This makes it important to ask, with Scheuerman, what focusing on questions of political violence help us see, and to what extent this may distract us from inquiring into (other) foundational political questions that should be approached in structural and systemic terms.

Political violence, of course, is not solely limited to more observable concrete instantiations of its often-brutal reality: war, strife, revolution, civic disobedience. Some of the authors (for example Vainio, Rakhmanin) emphasize that there are forms of political violence which work at deeper ideological, religious, and cultural levels. While these forms often go unnoticed, they draw ideological, moral boundaries and sow identitarian division, which creates enemies and violent oppressive power structures. So, whose perspective? Who do we need to listen to? Who are able to bring these violent tendencies into view? Many different human and disciplinary perspectives may be capable of doing so, from legal studies, intellectual history, and religious studies, to critical political philosophy. One important disciplinary perspective that continues to produce critical work is postcolonial and feminist thought. For instance, Laura Sjoberg has emphasized the importance of an informed feminist perspective on the question of political violence. This perspective emphasizes context, particularly in relation to Western values that may perpetuate violence and oppression in non-Western contexts. This approach recognizes the diversity of experiences and perspectives among women from different sociocultural backgrounds, and the need to address the complex intersections of race, class, gender, and other factors in understanding political violence. By doing so, it can uncover the gender bias in the conceptual frameworks within which international political discourse operates, and to provide tools and insight as to how one should proceed in reconfiguring these biased and violent conceptualities. Moreover, postcolonial feminism highlights the need for reflexivity in feminist analysis. By acknowledging how Western feminist perspectives may inadvertently reproduce colonialist attitudes and practices, postcolonial feminists seek to decolonize feminist theory and practice. Such an acknowledgement involves recognizing the power dynamics and

structures that shape feminist discourses, and actively working to center the voices and experiences of women from marginalized communities.³

The same task of identifying, recognizing, and ultimately questioning discourses of political violence has guided this volume. Despite the European approach, our aim has been to bring to the fore central conceptual, historical, theological, philosophical contexts and frameworks that have shaped understandings of political violence, its justification and limit. Better and clearer understanding of these contexts and frameworks, in turn, could serve as means of self-reflection and critique.

³ See Laura Sjoberg, "Feminist Reflections on Political Violence," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Political Violence*, ed. Marie Breen-Smyth (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 263.

