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# VIOLENCE AND VALUE INTONOMY

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## ABSTRACT

The central tenet of the thesis is that violence is a problem - a problem that has resisted solution primarily because we have habitually misconceived what it is about violence that makes it a problem. The thesis consequently offers an understanding of violence and, on the basis of this understanding, proposes a practical ethic designed to work against violence, while augmenting our moral power and general welfare, in human society.

Part One is a factual analysis of violence in terms of what is called *Value Intonomy*. The aim is to show that reference to individual Value Intonomy explains what it is that makes violence harmful and, therefore, a problem. Ancillary hypotheses, on the addictive nature of violence and the integral nature of the problem of violence in human society, are appended to this part to complete the theory of violence offered.

Part Two is an ethical analysis of violence in terms of what is called the *Right to Value Intonomy Theory*. This theory is explained, in the context of rights theories, and it is argued that violating the right to Value Intonomy is what makes violence morally wrong. It is then argued that recognising this Right, as the fundamental right of all moral agents, is a necessary condition for any ethic that is intended as being effective against violence.

Finally, Part Three offers a Broad Consequentialism, based on the Right to Value Intonomy and called *Renovation Ethics*, as a practical solution to the problem of reducing violence and augmenting welfare in human society.

## INDEX

### PART ONE: The Value Intonomy Theory of Violence

Chapter One	A Theory of Violence	Pg 1
Chapter Two	The Integral Paradigm	Pg 14
Chapter Three	The Addiction Hypothesis	Pg 28
Chapter Four	The Economy of Violence	Pg 38

### PART TWO: The Right to Value Intonomy

Chapter Five	Rights Theory	Pg 50
Chapter Six	The Right to Value Intonomy	Pg 62
Chapter Seven	Value Intonomy as a Foundation	Pg 78

### PART THREE: Renovation Ethics

Chapter Eight	The Ethic Explained	Pg 91
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BIBLIOGRAPHY	Pg 107
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PART ONE: The Value Intonomy Theory of Violence

## Chapter One

### A THEORY OF VIOLENCE

'Violence' is a word used in more than one sense. It is, for example, obvious that someone using the word, say to describe the violent movements of a dancer, or a violent thunder storm, has in mind something very different to someone who speaks of, say, cultural violence or sexism as a violence against women.

The first use of the word primarily denotes force, particularly gross or sudden force. In law, for example, we distinguish between straight-forward robbery, and robbery with violence, precisely by means of the quality of force employed in the latter. We also talk, metaphorically, of things like a violent clash of colours. In these instances the idea of **intensity** predominates. Indeed, the etymology of the english word 'violent' comes from the root 'vis', meaning 'strength', via the latin noun 'violentia', meaning 'impetuosity'. The second use of the word, however, involves **violation**. It denotes the misuse of power to breach, trespass or harm. The subtle institutionalised misuse of power in slavery, for example, can be called violent in this second sense even in those instances where it can not be called violent in the first sense.

The English language does not distinguish between the various senses of the word 'violence' and its cognates. We do not have distinct terms for violence-as-force, violence-as-harm violence-as-trespass and violence-as-wrong, although these are conceptually distinct and we can intend any of them, alone or in combination, when we use the word. In ordinary usage the elements of violence often run parallel or even at cross-purposes.

This lack of linguistic subtlety is a source of chronic confusion in debates about violence. A person referring to something as violent in the forceful sense, for example, often intends that the force also be understood as harmful, wrong or both. I will not, however, be attempting in this thesis to explicate the many and subtle combinations of force, harm and wrong that can mark various uses of the word. Instead I will concentrate on the second use of the word (ie: the idea of *violence as the violation of something*) and the unqualified word '**violence**' will be used in this sense. This sense often subsumes the senses of violence as forceful, harmful or wrong. Where these distinctions are important I will use the device of **f/violence** (for *violence as force*), **h/violence** (for *violence as harm*) and **m/violence** (for *violence as wrong*).

This thesis will attempt to show that the intuitions, motivating the violence-as-violation sense of the word, are conceptually accurate. Something real is violated by all those acts and institutions we recognise or intuit as violent. Moreover, it is the very same thing which is violated in every case; whether the force used is as gross and explosive as a military assault, or as subtle and institutionalised as a prevailing cultural attitude. It is the nature of that violation which is the first subject of this thesis. This is not necessarily to assert that acts which do not meet the criteria of violence as violation (criteria that will be given in this thesis) are not, therefore, violent. A central tenet of the thesis is, however, that when we speak of violence as a problem, it is the violating aspect of violence which makes it problematical. It should also be stressed, before explicating the theory proper, that **the Value Intonomy Theory of Violence is not a theory about m/violence**. It is, rather, a theory about what violence is and how it works.

THE FACT OF VALUE INTONOMY

The Right to Value Intonomy Theory, and Renovation Ethics, both argued for in this thesis, are based on a theory of violence which postulates that what makes any act, attitude or social institution violent (whether or not it employs gross or sudden force) is the violation of something essential and important about what it is to be a person. For this aspect of personhood, violated by violence, I coin the phrase **Value Intonomy** (the word 'intonomy' is a synthesis of the words 'integrity' and 'autonomy' - moral integrity and moral autonomy being the two primary elements of personhood that are the victims of violence).

By 'person' I primarily intend those beings who evaluate (literally e-value-ate) their life experiences. And by 'Value Intonomy' I intend the moral and psychological cohesion of personality as an aspect of such beings. I will argue that reference to violence as a violation of Value Intonomy already functions implicitly in our common and enduring intuitions about both what violence is and why it is a problem - the theory is intended to explain our intuitions rather than replace them. I will further argue that explicit reference to the effect of violence on Value Intonomy is crucial to any true understanding of the troublesome nature of violence.

The phrase '*Value Intonomy*', in the theory, primarily denotes *the integration, into a morally autonomous and psychologically whole unit (a person), of those elements or properties that are necessary and sufficient for persons to think and act as if they were fully-functioning moral agents.* It is also, however, *that aspect of being a person which is the ultimate source of, and ground for, our belief systems about the value, meaning and significance of being persons.*



It should be noted here that Value Intonomy does not require that human beings actually be moral agents in a metaphysical sense - only that they persons<sup>1</sup>.

One of the things which human persons do is think and act as if they were moral agents. However, for human beings to actually be moral agents, in the metaphysical sense, requires that at least three things hold:

- 1) That they do have genuine freedom of moral choice.
- 2) That moral values (such as good and evil) actually exist.
- 3) That they have some kind of access to knowledge of moral values when making their moral choices.

These three conditions have all been powerfully challenged and, at the time of writing, remain among the most controversial issues in moral philosophy. Nevertheless, and regardless of the outcome of the debates about these issues, the fact remains that human beings do normally think and act as if they were moral agents. They attribute value and meaning to states of affairs. This is a distinctive, endemic and treasured element of what it is to be human. It is because of this syndrome of belief and behaviour that they perceive certain behaviours to be violent, and it is because of this belief that they perceive violence to be a problem.

My own conviction is that the reason human beings think and act as if they were moral agents is precisely because they are moral agents. It is not, however, the intention of this thesis to specifically argue this case. It is enough for the theory to observe that humans do so think and act and, on the basis of this observation, define Value Intonomy in terms of that thought and behaviour.

The word 'value' in the phrase 'Value Intonomy' reflects the fact that to be a person is, in part at least, to be a valuing being. As implied above, the primary intent here is

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1 For the distinction between persons and humans see Tooley, Michael. *Abortion and Infanticide*. (Clarendon Press, U.K. 1985) Chapter Four, pp. 51-58

moral, reflecting the fact that one of the unique things which human persons do is morally value acts as good or evil, right or wrong. Human beings, however, also psychologically value themselves and their lives as significant or worthless. They aesthetically value objects as beautiful or ugly, and epistemologically value event and states of affairs as meaningful or meaningless.

Thus the word *value* denotes *the universal assumption of value agency in the behaviour of human beings - an assumption which entails morality, psychological value (that people matter, that they are significant beings), aesthetics and epistemology*. Thus if a being thinks in terms of right and wrong, beauty and ugliness, significance and meaninglessness; if it believes, and acts as if, it had real choices; if its deliberations about what it perceives as its choices involve normative, aesthetic or epistemic considerations, and if it can experience guilt, then that being is a person in terms of this theory.

That human beings do think and act this way, and that thinking and acting this way is at least one of the things that makes them persons, is a simple and incontrovertible fact of the human experience. We are all rule-makers; we are valuers of things, including our selves. And all morality, all art, all rule making, all moral or values talk whatsoever, assumes Value Intonomy. For example, even just to try and motivate someone's behaviour, by appealing to the concept of what is in their own interests, is to presuppose that they have the capability to *recognize* and act normatively on the concept of interest (ie: that they have the moral element of Value Intonomy). Of course other creatures on the planet can be said to *have* interests, welfare, and so on, but they do not *conceptualize* them as such. Wasps, for example, are not motivated to build colonies and feed their young because they recognize that so doing is in their interests.

They simply, and mindlessly, build colonies and feed their young<sup>2</sup>. Thus, although we can, and do, incorporate the interests of non-persons into our moral deliberations, *consideration* of interests (which is a part of our Value Intonomy) is exclusively an activity of persons.

So too is the evident need, on the part of human persons, to feel at least potentially significant; to believe that our lives have, or should have, meaning and value. *Value Intonomy, the same feature of being persons that motivates us to value certain acts as good or evil, similarly motivates us to value our lives and the state of being persons.* And it really does not matter on what grounds someone may approve, disapprove, justify or prohibit anything, the very activity of evaluating or justifying, the possibility of behaving as a moral, and thereby significant, agent, is fundamental<sup>3</sup>. The absence of such a capacity denies the very possibility of Value Intonomy and, with it, the capability to function as a human person.

Furthermore, the tenability, or integrity, of believing that we are the kinds of beings who have a realisable potential for value and meaning, is evidently essential to our survival and well-being as human persons. To survive, and live well, we need to be able to believe that we matter, that our lives have value. The tenability of that belief, and the sense of personal significance based upon it, is violated whenever our Value Intonomy is violated. That is what violence does, and that is why violence is a problem.

In the phrase 'Value Intonomy' the word 'value' denotes a kind of functioning whereas the coined word 'intonomy' denotes a quality of that functioning.

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2 Cf: Dennett, Daniel. *ELBOW ROOM: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting* Clarendon, Oxford, 1984. esp Pg 11

3 Cf: Waldron, Jeremy. *Theories of Rights* (OUP, 1984) pg 20

Specifically, the word 'intonomy' denotes the sufficiency of a kind of wholeness; the uncoerced cohesion of related parts into a single, morally 'healthy', locus (which is the person her or himself, seen as a morally autonomous unit).

The word 'Intonomy' is devised from the fusion of 'integrity' and 'autonomy' in order to reflect an important hypothesis about what it is to be a person.

The word 'integrity', as used here, needs to be understood more as a cognate of 'integral' than of 'good'. And, as is the case with physical integrity (ie:health) it is a quality of being usually most evident in proportion to its lack. Normally, say, when we talk of someone as having integrity, we intend that they be understood as a thoroughly decent person, someone who is morally upright, honest and trustworthy. This sense of integrity, as a synonym of 'Good', is close to that intended in the phrase 'Value Intonomy' and, in normal circumstances, one flows from the other. In the sense in which I intend the word, however, someone like, for example, a slave simply cannot have the integrity element of Value Intonomy (that capability is given over to the hands of the slave owner), even if they, in themselves, are a thoroughly decent person. The kind of integrity, intended by phrases such as 'moral integrity' is essentially focused on the self as a morally autonomous being. As will be argued below<sup>4</sup>, however:

- a) persons are significantly social constructs, and
- b) societies themselves may lack moral integrity.

Because of the first fact (a) persons cannot truly be said to be fully autonomous beings in the sense of being morally self-sufficient or unconnected to society. Nevertheless, because of the second fact (b), a degree of moral autonomy needs to be defined and protected if the integrity of persons is to survive in a morally violent society. It is to morally distinguish personal integrity, from the social integrity of

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter Two 'The Integral Paradigm'

which persons are necessarily a part, that the word 'intonomy' is coined. 'Intonomy' may therefore be read as referring to the *integrity and autonomy of a valuing being, given that such beings exist within the interdependence of a society (which itself may have varying degrees of integrity.*

#### INTONOMY

Intonomy comprises three main elements (two primary and one secondary) and operates on two levels. The two primary elements of Value Intonomy are moral freedom and moral power. Believing ourselves to be moral agents, we only have Value *Intonomy* when we can also believe that we have the freedom and power to function as moral agents, especially in the definition and influence of our own destinies.

**Moral freedom**, as used here, is to be understood not as a freedom from necessity, nor is it the privilege of arbitrary choice. It is, rather, the freedom, within such natural constraints as we may all have to endure, to order our own values, to make our own moral choices, set our own goals and take responsibility for them. Such freedom is synonymous with being a moral adult and, on the evidence of Psychology, is a necessary condition of mental health<sup>5</sup>.

**Moral power**, similarly, is both the ability to exercise the results of our own moral freedom and the capacity to preserve our own integrity against the misuse of power by other people. Thus it is, at base, the power to survive; the power to assert ourselves, especially in the face of competition from nature and other people, in the belief that our survival, our value, matters. Essentially the distinction between moral freedom and moral power is that between private and public valences of value. Moral freedom is the power to be ourselves within the social context, moral power is the freedom to interact with society on terms which preserve and enhance our own moral integrity.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf: Fromm, Erich *Man for Himself* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, U.K. 1975). See especially pp. viii, 7, 151.

Issuing from Moral freedom and power is a third, and secondary element, of **moral responsibility**, whereby we can be held accountable for the consequences of our choices and actions. We can only have moral responsibility to the extent that we exercise our moral freedom and power. Thus anyone with Value Intonomy can rationally be held morally responsible, and the denial of this responsibility (as, for example, under Paternalism) is itself felt as a form of violence, even though the responsibility itself is not primary - being conditional on moral power and freedom.

To illustrate the autonomy aspect of Value Intonomy take, for example, the situation in which a person has a choice between two values (say, a career option and some outside interest such as a sport). They choose to sacrifice one value for an uncertain possibility of realising the other. If this choice is a function of their own values system (ie: if it is they who value one state above the other), if their choice has not been defrauded by deceit, and if the only constraints they face, in pursuit of this goal, are the normal and natural ones of ability and circumstance, then, in that regard at least, they still have Value Intonomy as the phrase is used in the Value Intonomy Theory of Violence. This is so even if, under the terms of various ethical theories, their choices can be categorised as mistaken or morally wrong. On the other hand, a slave, or someone who is, say, economically oppressed, lacks Value Intonomy to the extent to which they are made not free to order their own values and do not have the power to attempt the realisation of those values within their lives or societies.

The two levels on which the integrity aspect of intonomy operates are: within itself and as part of the overall personality.

1) Within itself our morality has integrity when its conceptual elements are internally consistent with each other, and when they are assented to, rather than being

violently coerced. The conceptual elements, referred to here, are those of the axiology (the ordering of values) and the deontic (the norms that guide behaviour). A person may, for example, have a deontic that is foolish or counter-productive in terms of their own axiology. Similarly the axiology itself may be distorted through coerced, self-destructive or contradictory elements. Such a morality lacks integrity in terms of the Value Intonomy Theory.

2) The second level of integrity is a function of the fact that assumptions of moral agency are part of what it is to be persons. If these assumptions are absent, then we are not fully persons. If they are present, but in a way that distorts or truncates the personality, then we are damaged persons.

Thus our morality is integral with our personhood when it augments, rather than erodes, our personal welfare, our potential as human beings, and the ability to function constructively as members of human society. A sick or violent morality, for example, damages our sense of self and self-worth, it diminishes or perverts our abilities. Such a morality lacks integrity in a way similar to the way, say, a diseased liver lacks physical integrity both within itself and as part of the body from which it derives, and to which it contributes, being. In this sense 'integrity' has a close affinity with what existentialist philosophers and psychologists refer to as 'authenticity'<sup>6</sup>. An authentic personality being, in part at least, one which has a moral element which both makes sense and is a strength to it.

To SUMMARISE: Whether or not people are, in fact, moral agents, and whether or not that moral agency, if it exists,

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<sup>6</sup> For philosophical 'authenticity' refer to Olafson, Frederick. 'Authenticity and Obligation' in *Principles and Persons. An Ethical Interpretation of Existentialism* (Johns Hopkins, U.S. 1967). Extracts reprinted in Taylor, Paul. *Problems of Moral Philosophy* (3rd ed) (Wadsworth, U.S. 1978). pp. 681-690 (cf: p. 623). See also Bambrough, Renford. *Moral Scepticism and Moral Knowledge* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, U.K. 1979) pp. 77 & 82.

does give their lives value and significance, is entirely a moot point. Universally, however, people do think and act as if that was the case - and that syndrome of belief and behaviour (which I call Value Intonomy) is enough for us to perceive certain situations as violent and to perceive violence as a problem. Furthermore, the integrity of that syndrome is essential to the well-being of human persons - we do need to 'believe in ourselves' in order to live well (and that essential self-affirmation is itself a function of Value Intonomy). It is the tenability of that syndrome, and the sense of self which it incorporates, that is violated by those misuses of human power which we call 'violent'.

#### VIOLENCE AS THE VIOLATION OF VALUE INTONOMY

The crux of the Value Intonomy Theory of Violence is that Value Intonomy exists, as defined and as a fact of the human condition. It is not a normative or hypothetical construct demanding metaphysically dubious premises. Rather, it is an empirically verifiable, quantifiable and essential fact of human experience. Because this is so, because Value Intonomy exists and has the function that it does, **the damage or denial of a human being's Value Intonomy damages or denies their opportunity to participate fully in personhood. This is what violence does. And it is this damage, to our personhood, that is the central harm and problem of violence.** Therefore, talk of violence, as violating Value Intonomy, entails that **violence violates the fact and sense of our being persons** (ie: valuing and potentially significant beings). It violates our moral freedom, our moral power, and thereby violates what it is to be a person.

Not all forceful acts do this, and not all the acts that do achieve this are forceful, but I do believe that, if we explore the enduring human perceptions about what is violent, we will find the violation of what I have called 'Value Intonomy' to be a common element in those perceptions.



## THE FACTUAL DEFINITION OF VIOLENCE

In consequence of what has been said above, **violence** is defined as **the violation of Value Intonomy with the intent or effect of harm**. Any behaviour which meets this criterion is violent in terms of this theory, whether or not it involves f/, h/ or m/violence. (For example, if an violent harm is morally justified it ceases to be m/violent [wrong]. Under this theory it remains factually violent nonetheless).

In this definition of violence 'Value Intonomy' identifies what is violated and 'harm' identifies the kind of violation. Both words are used solely in the descriptive sense.

The primary import of 'harm', as used here, is that of damage to the interests, welfare or moral/psychological integration of the person whose Value Intonomy is being violated, and it is the factor which distinguishes violence from non-violent trespass or mere hurt. It is obvious, for example, that a good dentist can hurt a patient without harming them, and a bad dentist can harm a patient without hurting them - indeed, in dentistry, the only way not to harm a patient may be to hurt them. Thus violent harm may include hurt but, where it does, it is hurt plus something else. That 'something else' is primarily an erosion of the object person's welfare and personhood by the diminution of their Value Intonomy.

The fact of harm is qualified with the phrase 'intent or effect' because it is not necessary for violence to be successful in order for it to be violent. Nor does the success of violence render it less violent. Certain victims of institutionalised violence (such as slavery, sexism or internment) have maintained their Value Intonomy in spite of the violence done against them. Some, on the other hand, have accepted the denial of their moral power and freedom - finding pleasure or value in the escape from responsibility that such states can bring. In the first case violence fails

to achieve the intended end, in the second case, the success of violence is embraced as a good by the victim. In both cases, however, the mere intent to deny people their moral power and freedom is enough to render the acts violent, in terms of the Value Intonomy Theory, quite independently of the effects which follow.

This is not to say that all human acts of force or harm, which fall outside this definition, are not violent or are not problems. Allied acts (such as, for example, cruelty against animals) are, however, derivative of this problem. Thus the violation of Value Intonomy, either by committing or enduring violence, is the crux, not the limit, of the problem.

This, moreover, is simply what the core problem of violence is, regardless of any particular ethical considerations. Violating Value Intonomy may, or may not, make violence *wrong*. That is a judgement that depends on normative theory. However, independently of ethical judgements, violating Value Intonomy is what makes certain acts *violent* - and being violent, in this sense, is what makes those acts a problem for persons (ie: beings with Value Intonomy).

I started this chapter by pointing out that, underlying one of our common uses of the term 'violence' is the intuition of something being violated. That 'something' is our Value Intonomy - the integration of value-assuming beliefs and behaviours, in our personality, which *makes* us the kind of beings who experience existence within an evaluative framework (both outside of ourselves, in the sense of postulating certain acts to be good or evil, and within ourselves, in the sense of understanding ourselves to be worthwhile beings). This is a real thing, a fact, and it matters to human survival. Violence simply is the violation of that syndrome.