



Think about violence. Benjamin's Readers.

Pensar la violencia. Los lectores de Benjamín.

DOI: 10.32870/sincronia.axxv.n80.2b21

Jesus Lopez Salas

Department of Philosophy. University of Guadalajara. (MEXICO)

EC: jlsalasqt@gmail.com

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

Received: 18/01/2021

Reviewed: 30/04/2021

Accepted: 16/06/2021

ABSTRACT

In what follows the reader will find an exposition of Benjamin's text *For a Critique of Violence*, the interpretation made by Derrida, Honneth, Žižek, among others, as well as Bernstein's comment on those readings. Derrida has associated the Benjamin text with the "final solution", grouping it into the forms of thought that justify or make possible acts similar to those facts. Honneth looks for an affable outlet, turning towards a proposal for a cultural revolution. Žižek associates the resentment that humans experience to explain historical events, which are examples of pure or divine violence, which are caused by love that seeks good. Bernstein will accept the reading of Derrida, which he considers a product of imagination. He appreciates Honneth's performance, he finds it enlightening. He rejects the idea of reducing guilt to the conscience of the person responsible for violent acts, who silently and autonomously judges himself for the acts committed, seems to him inadmissible; he considers that violence should be a community discussion supported by fallibilist pluralism.

Keywords: Decision. Manifestation. Revelation. Violence. Messianism. Revolution. Right. History. Fallibilism.



RESUMEN

En lo que sigue el lector encontrará una exposición del texto de Benjamín *Para una crítica de la violencia*, la interpretación que hace Derrida, Honneth, Žižek, entre otros; así como el comentario de Bernstein sobre esas lecturas. Derrida ha asociado el texto Benjamín a la “solución final”, agrupándolo en las formas de pensamiento que justifican o hacen posibles actos similares a esos hechos. Honneth busca una salida afable, girando hacia una propuesta de revolución cultural. Žižek asocia el resentimiento que los humanos experimentamos para explicar sucesos históricos, que son ejemplo de violencia pura o divina, que tienen por causa el amor que procura el bien. Bernstein aceptará la lectura de Derrida, que considera producto de la imaginación. Aprecia la interpretación de Honneth, le parece iluminadora. Rechaza la idea de reducir la culpa a la conciencia de quien es responsable de actos violentos, que en silencio y de manera autónoma se juzgue a sí mismo por los actos cometidos, le parece inadmisibles; considera que la violencia debe ser una discusión en comunidad apoyada por el pluralismo falibilista.

Palabras clave: Decisión. Manifestación. Revelación. Violencia. Mesianismo. Revolución. Derecho. Historia. Falibilismo

Benjamin left a set of theses on history unpublished 19 years after the writing of the essay *For a Critique of Violence*; particularly the IX thesis alludes to violence in a way that combines historical evolution and the awareness of human doing, which makes evident his responsibility for what happened; shows the presence of God through an angel who witnesses what happened, of an absent God who returns and finds the rubble of death and destruction:

My wing is ready to fly,
I voluntarily turn back,
for if I had time left to live,
he would have little fortune.
Gerhard Scholem, *Greeting from the Angelus*

There is a painting by Klee that is titled *Angelus Novus*. An angel is seen in him apparently at the moment of moving away from something on which he looks. His eyes are disjointed, his



mouth is open and his wings are stretched out. The angel of history must have that aspect. His face is turned to the past. In what for us appears as a chain of events, he sees a unique catastrophe, which endlessly accumulates ruin upon ruin and throws them at his feet. The angel would like to stop, awaken the dead and recompose the shattered. But a storm descends from Paradise and swirls in its wings and is so strong that the angel cannot fold them. This storm drags him irresistibly into the future, to which he turns his back, while the accumulation of ruins rises before him into the sky. Such a tempest is what we call progress (Benjamin, 2007, pp. 69-70).

Regardless of the religious content of the thesis and that it may seem absurd to allude to God in the awareness of the destruction and catastrophe that occurred in the future of humanity, which to a large extent is the responsibility of man, Benjamin forces us to think about what should not have happened. Following the IX thesis we can affirm that the angel is a witness, he is aware of what happened in history, his gaze awakens him from lethargy and makes him see the disaster, the catastrophe and, in turn, his impotence, his inability that throws him into the future. There is only death and destruction, perhaps Benjamin thought of the storm that propels the angel forward is the progress in his march that takes him away from Paradise and drags the divine being with force superior to his will. This thesis on history emphasizes that human life has only taken place in violence and that the result of historical events is death and destruction, not happiness. The allusion to progress as the cause that prevents the curbing of catastrophe and destruction, leads the powerless conscience towards a future whose march it cannot stop. Consciousness and progress appear as forces in tension. This weak opposition to progress is reduced to witnessing and perhaps keeping the victims in memory, to pointing out the events, apart from that nothing.

Bernstein wrote a text entitled *Violence. Thinking without railings* in 2013, there he engages in a dialogue mainly with five thinkers: Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt, Frantz Fanón and Jan Assmann; his intention is to philosophize in a group, clarify one's own thoughts in contrast with those of others, build questions that can only come from looking at the different in the familiar. He could not have selected such a distant group in postures and ideas, but he finds a thread that



allows him to weave his own philosophy into the contrast and the common that is in them. The idea of decision is present throughout his reflection and dialogue, since it constitutes the nodal point of violence, before doing anything, you have to decide to do it. Bernstein is stimulated because the questions he constructs help his thinking emerge on an issue as complex as violence:

There is a disturbing paradox regarding violence, there are too many ideas and thoughts about it, however, instead of clearing up the confusion, it becomes more acute: The paradox is that despite (or perhaps because of) that there is so much discussion about violence, there is enormous confusion about what we mean by violence (Bernstein, 2015, p. 31).

Of the five thinkers with whom Bernstein dialogues, the most enigmatic is perhaps Walter Benjamín, his writing *For a Critique of Violence* of 1921 has provoked multiple interpretations in various senses and, like others, the American philosopher generates a certain singular concern.

Santiago Rey Salamanca, who writes the presentation of *Violencia. Thinking without railing*, comments the following on the form that Bernstein philosophy does in this text: It establishes an idealized dialogue that tries to harmonize the positions of the interlocutors. He is accompanied in his conversations by an agnostic spirit that allows him not to give value to proposals that do not emerge from dialogue. No matter the distance or tradition from which the texts come, their concern is to reflect on our time, their intention is always to make the most diverse traditions dialogue in their thinking.

Bernstein tries not to be a victim of what he calls Cartesian anxiety, which is characterized by the distressing search for undoubted certainty or a foundation that is a stable point to believe and, with it, the agony ceases. We must consider the opposite and assume that in the closing or conclusion we will not have that certainty and that the matter or problem will remain open. His proposal is to think without a railing, as Arendt suggests, that is, to constantly look for a meaning, but without having support that conditions the search or determines it previously. Do not start from predetermined categories, whether epistemic, political, moral or cultural. Their task is to break through preconceived positions.



Bernstein's method could be called dialogical, a radical dialogue that supposes as necessary to think together with others, this always puts him in a hermeneutic attitude when trying to understand and interpret the other, considering and giving value to the probability that reason has our interlocutor.

For Bernstein to think is to give meaning to the world in which we live, to endow our life with possibilities and, therefore, this search always leads us to go further, not to believe that there is a final point of arrival, but that it is a place of passage to which we arrive to continue the march; our thinking cannot be reduced to logical calculation, instrumental reason or scientific knowledge, even though they may be allies in our path. It is an activity that must be done again and again so that it does not fade, it is our obligation to keep alive the thought doing it daily and we must take care of it so that it does not fall into forms and modes that annihilate it or put it on pause.

While "thinking without railings" is assumed by Arendt, like other forms of thought that are foreign to our thinker, such as the search for foundations or the nihilistic attitude, deconstruction or critical theory, we must always, no matter how far away or close we are, have the attitude of fallibilistic pluralism, which consists of listening to the other and discussing all possible alternatives. In complex matters such as allowing violence, the attitude must be based on an informed decision that involves a rigorous analysis and be aware, clearly, of the consequences that follow from it. Rigorous analysis must consider our problem from the most diverse points of view and clarity is acquired in dialogue when we confront all points of view, that allows us to see the singularities and peculiarities that we are dealing with.

Benjamin's Vision of Violence

Bernstein being extremely careful when he reads Benjamin, he expresses how complex it is to follow him in his plot transit, especially when he introduces violence as a manifestation and the ideas of destiny and revelation, whose dependence on his conception of divine violence is decisive to give meaning to what was said by Brecht's friend (Bernstein, 2015, p. 103).



Walter Benjamin presents us with two positive points, which I consider relevant from Bernstein's perspective: one, to think of violence as a phenomenon in itself, that is, without linking it as a means or as an end of another phenomenon; this allows us to ask ethically more clearly: is violence morally justifiable? The complex thing that this approach faces is that common sense immediately displaces it to the background, violence appears as a means, that is, it asks why it happened, the cause or reason is sought by appealing to the purpose sought; in opposition to this Benjamin provides us with a way to ask about it regardless of the place it occupies in the justification, it interests it as a fact or event without more; it will be necessary to distinguish the facts, which is what happens and forms the world; another time is when we talk about it, we issue opinions; Brecht's friend, in his criticism, is interested in having violence taken as a founding fact. A second important point, even though Benjamin exposes it in a secondary, if not marginal, way, are the alternatives for human acts unrelated to violence, a small window that we must highlight. Bernstein comments at this point on the interpretations of Butler and Critchley from which he differs, since they do not consider this clear of Benjamin's thought, rather they give meaning to divine violence as a non-violent form. Although our philosopher recognizes affinity in the attitude of both commentators with being able to have mechanisms that prevent violence, he does not agree with their understanding of the matter.

David Hume supposes that the relationship between cause and effect, which in the eyes of metaphysicians appears as a universal natural law, is only the habit that our mind builds as a result of its repetitive appearance of that relationship. Benjamin makes us think in a similar way about violence and justice, by habit we associate legitimately accepted violence with action that pursues just ends, he wants us to think about violence regardless of the ends; that is, to dissociate this relationship and remove the status of medium to violence. Benjamin's intention is not to leave out of criticism that kind of violence that we naturally consider to be fair.

With the desire to specify what has been said, we cannot think of violence without a cause or end pursued, it could be replicated: the ends have not always been chosen correctly; this disengagement is due to the fact that the ends do not correspond to violence as a means, that they



are spurious, and those who give reason for it should be sought. Multiple means can be chosen to achieve the same end, before this alternative there will always be a non-violent alternative. The relationship means and ends, to understand what Benjamin tries to say, regardless of whether they are the only means to guarantee justice, after analyzing all possible avenues and the result are those that are adequate and minimize expenditure and inevitably include violence, we must take violence independently, like what happens. Benjamin proposes to observe violence without links, that we break with this relationship of means and ends or any other justification. In the foreground violence appears, manifests itself and, in the second moment, we justify it, or in the opposite direction, we give ourselves a reason and act, as a consequence violence occurs; in both cases it is the fact that matters, what happens and this is violence.

For Benjamin it will be necessary to think of violence in itself, not as a Platonic idea, but as that which happens without the need for another, this arises from the fact that it is regularly thought of as a means, especially in the context of law, where it is subordinated to the ends for its understanding; this subordination reduces it to being a useful condition. Of the two conceptions of law, only the positive one seems to help to understand violence independently, since the relationship of means and ends are established by historical evolution and human convention. In this sense Benjamin says: "Moreover, in principle, violence can only be found in the domain of the means and not in that of the ends" (Benjamin, 2001, p. 23). This question is always answered by appealing to the ends that are pursued, Benjamin wants us to formulate it without relation to any end: "In order to reach a decision in this regard, a finer criterion is necessary, a distinction within the sphere of the means, regardless of the ends it pursues" (Benjamin, 2001, p. 23).

Regularly the natural conception of law, by subordinating to just ends the use of violence, legitimizes it morally, hiding the problem; the use of violence is natural since it is a condition for achieving what rightly belongs to the individual, whether *de facto* or *de jure*. Even Darwinism is used to justify it, since there are natural ends that have to be achieved for life to continue its course. In the other sense, positive law underlines its historical condition, that is, there are no natural ends, but those that by tradition and convention humans establish, this allows criticism to be directed to the



means and not only with respect to ends such as natural law. This possibility of directing criticism to violence considering the means independently of the ends seems very favorable to Benjamin's purposes. Despite this, both positions share a fundamental dogma:

[...] just ends can be achieved by legitimate means and legitimate means can be employed for just ends. That is: Natural law aspires to "justify" the means by the justice of its ends; for its part, positive law tries to "guarantee" the justice of the ends through the legitimization of the means (Benjamín, 2001, p. 24).

For Benjamin we must abandon this perspective in order to show that the fundamental dogma of both visions is false, that is, we must start that legitimate means are irreconcilable with just ends, and, with it, be able to seek independent criteria for each one. For our thinker this is a fact and, therefore, he focuses his attention only on the legitimacy of some means that cover the field of violence: "Therefore, this criticism allows to locate its point of view outside the philosophy of positive law, but also outside the natural law" (Benjamin, 2001, p. 25). Even though the singularity of the vision of positive law makes sense to the critique of our philosopher.

The first problem is that it is not easy to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate violence if we assume positive law, since every criterion has only a historical character and, therefore, the classification is conventional. There could be no criterion of recognition or there could be partially, that is, having the capacity to sanction one violent act and not another. In this sense, Benjamin distinguishes ends without recognition, which he calls natural, compared to those that do have a criterion, which he calls ends of law (Benjamin, 2001, p. 26).

In the case of the individual, subject to law, who can use violence to satisfy his natural ends outside the law, the tendency of the State is to frustrate them and establish instead ends of law that will be carried out within the framework of the law and legal violence can be used. It is natural that the historical and determined legal order does not cover everything, the natural ends of individuals must be established within these limits, but they always go beyond their borders, hence it is always



important to try to adjust the norm to the natural and the natural to the norm. Education will be the strategy to adjust the natural to the norm:

Every natural end of individual persons will necessarily collide with ends of law, if their satisfaction requires the use, to a greater or lesser extent, of violence... [and adds,] [...] the law considers that violence at the hands of individuals constitutes a danger to the legal order (Benjamin, 2001, p. 26).

Therefore, the State judges only violence that violates the ends of law, but it is difficult to sustain a system that systematically pursues and punishes natural ends. By legally alienating the use of violence by individuals, the state intends to defend the law itself. Violence outside the law puts it at risk. Benjamin asks: What is the function that makes violence so threatening to the law, something so worthy of fear? (Benjamin, 2001, p. 27). However, Benjamin says, there are spaces where the pursuit of natural ends is allowed, in a certain way tolerated.

Workers with the right to strike, like the State, are the only subjects who can legally exercise violence. This is why the State regularly tends to withdraw workers' right to strike. The simple act of abstaining from work and stopping productive activities has been interpreted as violence; specifically for Benjamin this type of action is not violent:

Refraining from participating in an activity or service, which amounts to a "breakdown of relationships," can be a clean medium devoid of all violence. And he adds, ... from the point of view of the State or the law, the right to strike of workers does not include in any way the right to violence, but to escape from it if it is used by the employers, occasional strikes can occur as a declaration of "aversion" or "distancing" from the employer (Benjamín, 2001, p. 27).

Strikers must refrain from all violence even if they may be subjected to violence by the state or by the employer, but the simple act of abstaining from work is considered violence, yet legitimately accepted in the legal framework. The strike as violence in the face of state violence is accepted as pursuing certain legitimate ends.



In the radical sense of a revolutionary general strike, where all the workers go into unemployment, the State considers it contrary to law:

This difference of interpretation illustrates the practical contradiction of the rule of law, which consists in the fact that the State recognizes a violence, whose natural ends are indifferent to it, except in the serious case of the revolutionary general strike to which it vehemently opposes (Benjamin, 2001, p. 28).

In this case, an act is violent even if it is considered legal by law, says Benjamin, it is a practical non-logical contradiction.

Benjamin introduces a very peculiar term "pirate violence" to underline the case where discretionary purposes are sought that do not intend to modify or found new circumstances; it is perhaps this type of pirate violence that legitimizes the State, by allowing plurality of ends and their potential collisions, but which are far from modifying the legal order. But the transformative potential of the strike leads the state to consider it as a type of violence that violates the established right.

War violence shows that the violence contained in the strike is not isolated and that both come from the same practical contradiction. This violence is pirate because every State goes to war to preserve order and peace, however, once hostilities are over, the new circumstances are recognized as a new "right". This allows Benjamin to draw the following conclusion: "If war violence is admitted as the origin and model of all violence that pursues natural ends, then all these forms of violence are the basis of law." (Benjamin, 2001, p. 29). Therefore, every individual person is prohibited from exercising violence. And our thinker says: "[...] violence is not naively practiced or tolerated." (p. 29).

Compulsory military service obeys the purposes of the State, is the use of violence unrelated to the persecution of natural ends and represents the total submission of the citizen to the laws. With this, Benjamin exposes that the first form of violence founds law, while this is conservative of law. At this point Benjamin has taken the turn he had promised at the beginning, now violence is the basis of the right and not the other way around.



Criticism of the exercise of power by imposing tasks and obligations on citizens by the State remains subject to the traditional view of violence and law, and with them it is concealed that it founds and preserves the right. Pacifists and activists, including radicals, leave out of their criticism the ethical-historical basis of the issue. The Kantian categorical imperative is not alien to the positive conception of law, it is used as a criticism of the State in defense of the individual, it tries to preserve the right of all humanity in the person of each individual, that is why it is a conservative of law. That is, according to Benjamin, the criticism made, at the time he wrote his reflection, was still trapped in the paths of what he tries to criticize.

What has been achieved at the moment allows us to affirm that every individual is trapped in this tension of his natural ends in the face of the ends of law. The State imposes through its institutions a destiny that limits the natural impulses of the individual, by containing them, it violates its existence, subjecting it to the parameters established in the law. The natural ends, that is, the needs that the subject tries to satisfy, have their origin in history, needs that the individual must satisfy within the framework of social conditions, therefore, in this context rights are allowed and gives himself obligations, which do not always coincide with what is established in the ends of law determined by the State that gradually petrify.

The ends of the right that are imposed on the individual by limiting or containing his natural ends, are shown as the guarantee of taking care of him from the threat of falling into the hands of a criminal. There is a prefiguration of the life of the individual, that is, the State gives a certain destiny to his existence and commits itself to his care.

In the above sense, in the context of criticism, those who oppose the death penalty and raise their opposition because they consider that it transcends the scope of law and that it is a corrupt form or decadence of culture; Benjamin considers that this perspective, without clarity, directs his gaze to the whole body of the law and not to isolated laws; with this it approaches without reaching the origin of the right:



But its meaning was not to penalize the violation of the law, but to establish the new right. And it is that the use of violence on life and death reinforces, more than any other of its practices, the law itself (Benjamin, 2001, p. 31).

The examples given, the death penalty, the strike and the insecurity or fragility of the security of the individual open the possibility of criticism of violence in her face as a founder of law, as well as a conservative of law.

Something very peculiar in Benjamin's exhibition is his vision of the police, which seems to him more "monstrous" than the death penalty:

The ignominious thing about this authority is that for it the distinction between founding right and conservative law is raised. The reason why so few are aware of this is that the powers of the police are rarely sufficient to carry out their grossest operations, blindly directed against the most vulnerable and judicious sectors, and against whom the State has no need to protect with the laws. The founding right calls for the accreditation of victory and the conservative right that is subject to the limitation of not setting new ends. Police violence is exempted from both conditions (Benjamín, 2001, p. 32)

Although the police are beyond the functions of law, according to Benjamin, they fulfill a task of taking care of the sphere of destiny that the legal *corpus* imposes:

The "right" of the police indicates above all the point at which the State, by impotence or by the immanent contexts of each legal order, feels incapable of guaranteeing by means of this order, the very empirical ends that it pursues at all costs. [And Benjamin emphatically adds:] In contrast to the right that recognizes that the "decision" made in a place and a time, refers to a metaphysical category that justifies the critical appeal, the police institution, for its part, is not based on anything substantial. Its violence is formless, as well as an inconceivable, generalized monstrous irruption in the life of the civilized state (Benjamin, 2001, p. 32).



The use of the police is more natural and congruent in the state of absolute monarchy: "But in democracies their existence does not enjoy that privileged relationship, and illustrates, therefore, the maximum degeneration of violence." (p. 32).

In this sense, violence as a means is justified because it founds the right or preserves the right. Morally it is important to consider whether there are ways to regulate humanity's conflicts of interest by nonviolent means. Legal contracts are not, there it is specified when an individual can make use of violence or how he will be subject to violence: "Every institution of law is corrupted if the latent presence of violence disappears from its consciousness" (Benjamin, 2001, p. 33). Parliaments that seem to give peaceful treatment to political issues cannot leave coercion at the heart of their task. Faced with these two false alternatives against violence, Benjamin emphasizes that in private agreements there are clean means of non-violent conformity, based on the "culture of the heart": "Their subjective preconditions are sincere courtesy, affinity, love of peace, trust and everything that in this context is allowed to be named" (Benjamin, 2001, p. 34). Within the framework of the State, all this is determined by law and, as a consequence, by violence. In the opposite sense, the movement of individuals between things is manifested in these private relationships, therefore, civil agreements are an example of this, as well as the conversation that does not penalize lying:

It follows that there exists, precisely in the sphere of peaceful human agreement, legislation inaccessible to violence: the sphere of "mutual understanding", that is, language. The violence of law finally infiltrated it, much later and in the process of degeneration, by imposing punishment for deception.... Deception or deception, free of violence, was free from punishment according to the postulate "*ius civile vigilantibus scriptum est*", or "eye for money" in both Roman and Old German law (Benjamin, 2001, pp. 34-35).

This agreement between individuals, subject to the force of the word, based on seeing each other face to face and sealing the commitment, according to Benjamin, allows non-legal "contracts" alien to violence. Then there was the interference of the law in the agreements between individuals, not for moral reasons, but to avoid the violence that established a new right, with this the State



eliminated the possibility of the use of clean and non-violent means. This could be used in private and political affairs, even the strike could have clean means in this way.

Following Sorel¹ introduces a difference: political general strike and proletarian general strike. The first is to reform the mechanisms of the State and thereby strengthen the power of violence. The origin of the second was introduced by the German proletarians to put an end to state violence and was based, according to Benjamin, on clean means, with it, it was a question of introducing a type of work different from that established and not imposed by force: " This profound, ethical and genuinely revolutionary conception prevents a violent character from being ascribed to such a general strike, under the pretext of its possible catastrophic consequences" (Benjamin, 2001, p.36).

The productive sector assumed that its purpose was to harm the interests of the owners, which is why Benjamin points out: "Even so, the violence of an action should not be judged according to its ends or consequences but only according to the law of the means" (Benjamin, 2001, p. 37). That in this case they were not violent. In contrast, Benjamin comments that this was not the case with the doctors' strike, whose consequences were disastrous for the sick and patients.

Benjamin recognizes that there is some possibility of clean, nonviolent means:

It is a delicate task that is resolved in a more resolute way by resorting to arbitration, but which means a fundamentally higher method than that of arbitration, because it transcends the orders of law, and, therefore, also the violent one. Diplomacy, as well as the treatment between private persons, developed forms and virtues that, not because they had become external, always were so (Benjamin, 2001, p. 38).

Benjamin allows us to see that the name that really names things and phenomena, which underlies human language, allows us to reach agreements that preserve the power of the word, this in the face of the contract based on the language alien to the name, whose artificial essence prevents understanding between men.

¹ Sorel, Georges; (1978): *Reflections on violence*; Buenos Aires; Ediciones la pléyade; Trad.: Luis Alberto Ruiz.



With this, Benjamin opens the possibility not to use violence. And he considers that the law is shown as the monopolizer of all forms of violence and wonders: if there are other forms of violence different from those of the law. It makes a simile, where truth is to living languages what violence is to law; This to show how difficult it is to conceive of another form of violence, states the following: "While reason is incapable of deciding on the legitimacy of means and the justice of ends, it being rather a fatal violence that determines them, above it, God does." (Benjamin, 2001, p. 38).

This fatal violence, proper to God, is above the violence that gives rise to law. The historical condition of the ends and means provides a certain relativism to the vision of law, in such a way that the same ends, in different contexts, do not legitimize the same means, hence reason cannot account for them, but only by appealing to their historicity. The existence of violence is rooted in the fact that God expelled man from paradise; that is the origin, not as a foundation but as a fact. The violence happened at the hand of man as fact. The lost man judges and is judged because he does not possess knowledge, he lost it with his expulsion, his language lacks the nominative power that God granted him, hence his sentences do not name anything and only violence remains as resources to establish order, which no matter how rational and just it is, does not cease to be an artifice and a historical convention (Benjamin, 2010b, pp. 144-162).

Everyday experience shows us that there is another type of violence outside the law: anger, which erupts into violence without being a means to any end, that is, it only manifests itself. Like the gods of the mythical world who punish suddenly, there is no previous rule or norm, only threat and fact. With the example of anger, Benjamin leads us to look for another path of his criticism, at the same time deeper, and finds it in myth.

Mythical violence is pure manifestation of the gods. Niobe is punished by Apollo and Artemis, they kill her children and force her to silently pay for her guilt, for having defied the fate given by the gods. This violence is the basis of law, they do not punish based on previous criteria, but when punishing they establish order and law, establish a border and guarantee power. Benjamin reinforces this idea with the principle: ignoring the law does not exempt from punishment. This affirmation



allows to reinforce the written right in the face of mythical prescriptions, it helps to understand punishment and violence as a manifestation.

For Benjamin, mythical violence is the ancestor of violence as a means, which is the foundation of the State and the law. Mythical violence and violence as a means obey the same nature. In front of it is the pure and immediate violence that is of God. Benjamin stresses that pure violence is opposed to mythical violence:

While mythical violence is the founder of law, divine violence is the destroyer of law. If the former establishes borders, the latter razes them; if the mythical is guilty and atoning, the divine is redemptive; when that threat strikes, if it is bloody, this one is lethal, although bloodless (Benjamin, 2001, p. 41).

To exemplify pure or divine violence, he exposes the fact of rebellion against Moses to the foothills of Mount Sinai, where God punishes the rebels by burying them alive, there was no threat, only blow and annihilation; it was a bloodless and redemptive act; there is no blood. Faced with the case of Niobe, who is kept alive to suffer his guilt, the offenders who attacked Moses are redeemed in action through death. Dussel stresses that "That God, and that divine violence, is *Semitic* and *critical*, it is neither Greek nor modern [...]" (Lizarazo, 2012, p. 47). In this he correctly interprets Benjamin, he is the Jewish god, the only one with the ability to exercise pure violence; it seems to him that it is critical because it is in opposition to instrumental violence and since it does not come from the hegemonic culture; but strictly speaking, violence is not critical in any sense or in any of its forms, it is only, it happens, it is a fact. On this point Petar Bojanić underlines the way in which Benjamin's idea of revolution is misinterpreted, as well as his use of the figure of Korah, who is the villain who opposes the priest Aaron and the prophet Moses. Korah reveals himself before what was established by Moses, before the law that he introduces, he could be considered the first revolutionary but he is punished. The link between revolution and messianism has its first act, to follow Bojanić in his idea of the theater of the messianic: "[...] the ultimate and divine violence that God will exert upon him will be for Benjamin a purely revolutionary violence committed precisely against this first revolutionary"



(Bojanić, 2010, p. 139). The idea is simple, everyone who reveals himself in front of the official power, by that fact is revolutionary; hence Korak is revolutionary. However, in the opposite direction, revolutionary intervention is of God, because it founds a new historical epoch; Korah wants to preserve the mythical world and therefore rebels, his rebellion threatens the introduction of monotheism by Moses, which would be the true revolutionary act. Only that which makes the kingdom of God possible is revolutionary for Benjamin, but not just any god, it has to be Jewish or Semitic, not Greek or any other tradition.

Professor Aureliano Ortega Esquivel uses the idea of mythical violence to clarify the levels of violence in Mexico. He attributes to Benjamin to show that law and justice are antithetical, that the task of the latter is to prevent it from being carried out; since justice belongs to stateless societies. Ortega Esquivel's task is to show, through Benjamín, that the state of exception is everyday life:

This is insisted on because it is necessary to understand that violence is not a perversion, a deviation: violence is structural, it is constitutive of the "rule of law" and not a violation of the "rule of law"; that is why it is perceived as a "determined denial" of justice and this as the great absentee in any organic-concrete formation of State (Corona, 2018, p. 236).

This helps to understand that a society without violence will be one without classes, the one that overcomes with the abolition of the social differences that are defended by the State. While in this interpretation there is congruence with Benjamin's thought, there is also a breaking point, the society without violence is that of the kingdom of God, it is not enough that there are no classes.

In the absence of right, God educates through revelation and miracles; therefore, it threatens goods, rights, life and whatever is associated with them, but never absolutely against the souls of living beings, hence it can redeem souls (Cf: Benjamin, 2001, p. 42). Benjamin's messianism is to return to that life without right, without state, without mythical violence, where God judges and punishes.

This pure violence, Benjamin supposes, will have multiple oppositions, especially because it apparently justifies the violence of one against another, this the commandment "thou shalt not kill"



prevents it, it is not a regulatory criterion and, therefore, sanctioning the conduct, it is rather a pattern of behavior, a commandment that constitutes life itself. In case someone tries to substantiate the mandate by saying that life is sacred, whether vegetable, animal or human and, with it, having the right to punish another for having killed a living being or murder in self-defense, by mistake the commandment will reduce it to the criterion of law, it will not keep it in its sacred status. But the mandate is immovable, it is the presence of God that prevents taking the life of another; but once the murder has been consummated we cannot know the divine judgment on it:

This does not represent a criterion for reaching a verdict, but a pattern of behavior for the active person or community that must confront it in privacy, and that in tremendous cases has to assume the responsibility of evading its mandate (Benjamin, 2001, p. 42).

It is not possible for one human to condemn another based on this command, but he can orient his life through it. Benjamin affirms that the norms of Moses do not constitute law, they are mandates analogous to the morals that must guide our conduct and whose fulfillment appeals to the freedom of each one and, with it, to the custom of the community to which one belongs.

The revolutionary who murders the tyrant could be judged with the commandment as a mere juridical instrument, as if the biological life of the tyrant were more valuable than his life as a righteous man; those who judge him in this way will believe they have good reason to suppose that, by depriving the tyrant of his life, the insurgent is against God's will. Just existence, that is, just life, is more valuable than mere existence or life. The tyrant like Korah is struggling to keep the world submerged in myth and law. To think of life as sacred corresponds to myth and right, not to God:

It is probably not worth investigating the origin of the dogma of the sacredness of life. Possibly it is something very recent; a final confusion of the weakened Western tradition, for wanting to recover the saint who has lost in cosmological inscrutability (Benjamin, 2001, p. 43).



Strictly speaking, the human being must refrain from taking the life of another, but if that happens he cannot be judged with the Mosaic law either, that will be God's business, whose justice will happen at the final judgment. The violence that God punishes is that which emerges from the act of judging, that is, from using the law given by divinity as a juridical instrument.

Contrary to this, Dussel supposes that Benjamin does open the possibility in this text to consider life as sacred (Lizarazo, 2012, p. 48). An error similar to that of Karmy Bolton in his text: *Mythical violence and naked life in the thought of W. Benjamin*, where he supposes that Benjamin provides foundations for biopolitics (Karmy, 2005). Just to emphasize that for our philosopher naked life is not sacred, sacred is human life just in the eyes of God.

It is not enough to think from the now, we must go to the historical evolution to know how violence founds right or preserves the right, in its dialectical nature. Nor is it enough to show this oscillation, but we must see how it determines a historical era and opens the possibility of another, this is the determining point to know if the act is revolutionary or not.

But if violence comes to have, beyond the law, a place secured as a clean and immediate form, it follows, regardless of the form and possibility of revolutionary violence, to what name the highest manifestation of violence by man should be attributed. For the human being it is no longer possible but urgent to decide when it is really clean violence in each particular case. [...], the redemptive force is not within the reach of humans (Benjamin, 2001, p. 44).

Revolutionary acts can be adjuvants of clean violence, that is, they can do the will of God in the world, as an instrument of the manifestation of divine justice. Perhaps we must say that to be revolutionaries they must promote only clean violence. But it will not be to establish another state or juridical order, rather it is similar to St. Augustine, to bring to earth the kingdom of God, to restore the lost paradise, to return to the first moment where Adam had not sinned. Those who take action in this regard will be redeemed:



It could manifest itself in the real war in the same way that it will manifest itself to the mass of criminals in divine judgment... Divine violence, insignia and seal, never a means of sacred execution, can be called the reigning one (Benjamin, 2001, p. 45).

Dussel erroneously says about it:

The *legitimate coercion* of liberation, revolutionary, is not violence, although in certain cases (such as that of G. Washington, M Hidalgo y Costilla or the "French resistance" to the Nazi invasion) it can be armed, and that it is not yet legal (because a *new* legal order has not been established) (Lizarazo, 2012, p. 51).

He supposes that revolutionary acts are not violent, because the actions carried out are just, and according to him, this is because they are actions of the dispossessed against the powerful; it distorts Benjamin's idea. In a more radical sense, it affirms that indigenous communities are out of all violence, even in the punishments it imposes on those who have committed a crime against another member of the community itself:

The police institution, as well as the *new* state, are based on the legitimacy of the revolutionary community, whose praxis is not violent (according to the description given). For example, indigenous communities punish the murderer of another member of the community by feeding, by working their field, the family of the murdered, for life. It is a just punishment that the communal police enforce. It is not about violence but about justice (Lizarazo, 2012, p. 52).

That is, every act of state control (not revolutionary) represses the dispossessed and that is violence, but every revolutionary act, being just, is not violent. There is nothing further from what Benjamin claimed.

Following Benjamin, revolutionaries will be God's executing arm. How do you know that an act contributes to re-establishing paradise? The answer is only God.



Becoming aware of the historical evolution, which for Benjamin is associated with the course of man, after his fall into original sin, and who, precisely for this reason, is determined to be a victimizer and victim of violence, any form of social or political organization implies coercion and violence as an immanent reality, there is no way to escape it. That is why he states at the end of the text: *The critique of violence is the philosophy of his own history*.

Violence is not inherent in human nature, it is a condition of the loss of the name, that human capacity to call things for what they are, which has forgotten, and whose oblivion weaves the fabric of history (Benjamín, 2007, pp. 144-162).² There is closeness to the idea of the Greeks when considering that only the man who does not know commits injustice, with what Benjamin affirms, the loss of the use of the name (Muñiz-Hubermann, 1993); both are based on ignorance, although the Hellenic, like the Enlightenment, assume that man can be educated and, with it, learn to think on his own and reach the age of majority to leave violence in a past prisoner of irrationality; our philosopher subjects this overcoming to an act alien to the human, although it could be an instrument, it can only be that, an instrument, leaving liberation to the will of God.³ The human being will suffer violence because that is his condition as a sinner, whether mythical, juridical or divine; but being alien to his nature is latent the possibility that man himself with his limited resources can build mechanisms that free him from this burden.

Interpretations of the essay

Bernstein will engage in a dialogue with interpretations that will help him show his thoughts on the subject dealt with by Benjamin; thus Marcuse, Derrida, Žižek, Honneth, Butler and Critchley through their proposals will allow our thinker to specify ideas and reflections regarding *For a critique of violence*. From the beginning he alludes to the precept "thou shalt not kill", which is considered by Benjamin as a pattern of conduct and not a legal norm to judge, condemn or punish; it should be taken as a criterion to partially eradicate violence and only tolerate it in exceptional cases, according

²See also pages: 139-153, at: (Benjamin, 1986).

³To see the difference in the conception of the name see: (Muñiz-Huberman, 1993).



to Bernstein. It differs from the interpretation of Butler and Critchley because the decision must be made to allow violence after a thorough collective discussion and not to do it alone and individually, being aware of the consequences that this permissibility implies. On the other hand, he is concerned about Derrida's interpretation that considers that Benjamin's thoughts, in that text, justify or open the possibility to facts similar to the final solution and the gas chambers. He assesses Benjamin's essay in this way:

Moreover, his text does not provide an adequate basis for understanding violence and its interaction with non-violence. The power of the essay – the reason why it has elicited so much creative commentary and interpretation – lies in the questions it raises and not in the answers it offers (Bernstein, 2015, p. 35).

Marcuse has given an interpretation of the essay, described by Honneth as minimizing, where divine violence must be understood as the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressors and their messianism as a trope that expresses a historical truth, considers that it has nothing to do with their vision religiosity, it must be maintained in the field of non-religious sociology; This is because the oppressed live daily in a state of emergency and revolution becomes a historical necessity. The messiah is the will and conduct of all those who suffer under oppression. The bottom line is that Benjamin is a revolutionary thinker. For Bernstein the reading of Marcuse does not help to understand the relationship between mythical violence and divine violence, there is a minimization towards exclusively social and historical categories, in this he agrees with Honneth (Bernstein, 2015, pp. 104-105).

In that sense, Bernstein emphasizes Butler's interpretation of divine violence that Benjamin formulates, and that he considers as non-violent. This apparent contradiction Butler saves her by making a reading of the commandment "do not kill" in an ethical and not juridical sense, saying that it is a pattern of conduct that God, kind and loving, gave to men to avoid violence. Faced with the mythical and juridical violence that Butler calls coercive violence, he opposes the non-coercive violence that would be divine violence; hence the precept falls within the free decision of the



individual and is the contrast with the forced decision imposed by the law. In this sense there is a possibility for non-violence, but the option remains open for violent acts in extreme situations and that must be resolved in solitude, in the conscience of each one. Critchley relies on Butler to confirm an ethics of resistance and considers that the precept should not be interpreted as a categorical imperative for the reason that we cannot know the circumstances in which it should be applied, that is, it has no universal validity. Whoever is violent and comes to deprive another living being of his life must face in solitude and with his conscience the responsibility of his actions. Bernstein feels distant from this interpretation, not because he does not desire nonviolence, but because Benjamin does not affirm what Butler and Critchley say; it does not affirm that divine violence is non-violent, nor that the precept is moral. Pure or non-coercive violence is the revolutionary violence of messianic acts that is accepted as such by both interpreters and in that Marcuse is closer to the thought of Benjamin considers Bernstein. The example is the rebellion and death of Korah or Core, as Bernstein quotes it, is proof of pure or messianic violence, or as Butler calls it non-coercive. Bernstein says: "There is no reason to think that this 'bloodless' violence is non-violent" (2015, p. 112). For Bernstein the decision to opt for violence must be discussed in plurality, from the most rigorous points of view to reach the greatest possible clarity and punishment or guilt must be the judgment reasoned collectively, not individually or alone.

Unmasking the simulation of justice

In the case of Salinas Paz he puts Benjamin in a group of thinkers, among others there is Marx, Bourdieu, Habermas, Foucault, Agamben, Levinas, Gramsci, Althusser, to affirm that through certain categories that they propose the simulations of legitimacy of violence can be unmasked; these simulations, which lack moral authority, are carried out by law and non-genealogical philosophy. Benjamin is particularly credited with introducing the idea of violence allowed in an order of power and legitimacy to control the dispossessed. This discursive practice gives legitimacy to the use of injustice disguised, disguised as legitimacy. With this, Benjamin allows to have a look outside the



positive and natural law, he shows the bodies subdued and assimilated, dominated and repressed, violated by the apparatuses of power:

The use of violence to defend our group ends is not the same as the use of violence to defend the ends imposed in a simulated way by the hegemonic state. The key point is the establishment of a hegemonic state apparatus that, from directing the interests of the nation, goes on to dominate, repress, assimilate and violate to impose the ends of the group as national ends (Salinas, 2018, p. 14).

There are, as said, two uses of violence, one to preserve power and the other to defend our group ends. The latter are due to recognizing differences in gender, culture, ethnicity and class:

From this critical perspective of Benjamin, the State becomes the great criminal founder of law that serves to impose group ends, pretending to direct, but dominating, repressing, criminalizing and exercising violence; Hegemonic state that en-covers class ends under the guise of interest and end, necessity and process of the nation, mechanism of imposition (Salinas, 2018, p. 14).

The criticism for Salinas Paz are those processes to de-arm the illegitimate word disguised as legitimate. Our commentator critically shows us that they make us believe that, in his opinion, before the existence of the legal order there is no crime, because there is no code that typifies it, in such a way that it takes place after the law has been elaborated and accepted; where they are qualifying certain facts as criminal acts, but this is not so; therefore, Benjamin showed us that violence founds right and preserves right, putting the validity of the order of law in a State, according to Salinas Paz, repression is not weaponized within the legal debate, because it is prior to the conformation of the law, that is, what is considered as non-legal is prior to the establishment of the law, the oppressors have determined that the protest and rebellion of the dispossessed is a crime long before there is the legal apparatus to judge it and, in the opposite sense, the fact that the law punishes this as a crime, is because it exists before repression occurs. This game gives that intimidation to the criminalization



of the repressed, they are guilty before any legal order and the claim of their rights is typified in advance:

The founding violence proposed by Benjamin is the process in which, in order to design, promulgate and operate a law, commitments are resorted to outside the sense of community (unity over difference, being that this is the permanent reality of every community), and suppresses the difference in favor of unity by imposing ends, visions and interests of one group on the other, triumph of sameness, instrumental reason. (Salinas, 2018, p. 16).

There is a use of legitimacy when the rights of a few are established as the rights of all. To make the problem more acute, Salinas Paz introduces an example, he puts the idea of *Agamben's bare life* to talk about what is not assimilated by the state apparatuses, that is, through dialectics, which founds and preserves the right, allows violence on the other, on the unassimilated, to what Benjamin calls "life as something sacred". Criticism allows us to defend life, existence, against injustice disguised as justice by eliminating alienation (Salinas, 2018, p. 17). This idea of life as sacred is to go beyond simple life, it is to allow human life; an idea that is not in what Benjamin said. This dialectic that shows that the violence that preserves the right weakens the one that founds the right, respectively, is the use of the apparatuses of repression of the State that, in the name of justice, silence the voices of all, which could establish the new.

Using Marx, through the terms of Gramsci and Benjamin, one can adequately understand his task of unmasking that idea of Bruno Bauer's abstract man, proper to law as an instrument of legitimizing justice that hides injustice.

Although it is correctly attributed to Benjamin to try to get out of the vision of law, Salinas Paz introduces it through the back door, assuming that it is about establishing a right or social order of the dispossessed, without understanding that Benjamin tries to overcome this stage and, as Honneth says, observe that world from another place, alien to law and social order. Perhaps the thoughts that try to tell what the origin of violence is do not help to prevent it from happening or how to judge it with fewer errors. Salinas Paz assumes that the violence that preserves the right is of the oppressive



State, while the one that bases the right is the vision of the oppressed, strategically of the one that minimizes it; but once these, the oppressed, assume power they will have to assume the role of preserving the right; we forget that Benjamin's idea is to overcome this scheme and achieve in the future a world alien to law, law and the State. Even if the use of violence by the dispossessed is not explicitly stated, it is implicit in the statement. In opposition to this, non-violent alternatives must be sought, as Bernstein proposes, which would put fallibilistic pluralism as a criterion for knowing how to make decisions in situations where violence must inevitably be resorted to, which implies discussion in plurality and giving high value to the opinion of others, both before violent actions and after they have been carried out, that is, that place must be built through continuous thinking where the other is included.

Resentment, love and violence

Bernstein finds Žižek's interpretation of Benjamin's essay wrong, especially in relation to the precept "thou shalt not kill" and his interpretation of divine violence. In his assessment of his interlocutor's opinion he says the following: "Because of the playful exuberance of his dialectical cunning, it is always a challenge to pin down what Žižek is trying to say" (Bernstein, 2015, p. 113). Part of the polemic between Critchley and Žižek, who reciprocally distinguish themselves by clarifying their perspectives, the former fails to rescue divine violence as non-violence and his anarchist proposal reinforces the violence of the State; in reciprocity, the second is described as a defender of Leninist authoritarianism.

Žižek presents us, using cinematographic techniques, which is common in his analyses, the confrontation of God's vision of the human world against the subjective perspective of the criminal or the victim; the place of the camera that captures the fact from high shots and alien to the actors, from where God observes the events, crimes of which he is a witness. This helps Žižek to introduce the central theme of his interpretation of Benjamin's essay and thus relates his ninth thesis on history. God's participation in events, whether passive, active or indifferent, makes it possible to make sense of the facts as just, a similar role that Žižek gives to the *Aufklärung* (illustration). In the eyes of man it



can be a punishment that God imposes on humans for their decadence, for the corruption in which they have fallen, or it can be the granting of opportunities that allow them to show the best that is in them in the face of catastrophe (Žižek, 2009, pp. 211-215).

The search for deep meaning forces us to look for the role that God plays in human events: whether it punishes the sinner or provides opportunities to show virtue, in opposition to it, there are those who try to give explanations without resorting to the intervention of the transcendent God:

Our first conclusion must be that Benjamin's understanding of "divine violence" had nothing to do with the terrorist violence exercised by today's religious fundamentalists, who claim to act in the name of God and as an instrument of the divine will [... (Žižek, 2009, p. 2019).

For Žižek violence is more a matter of human resentment, the violent acts carried out by the religious in the name of God, according to their perspective, obey because they intend to advance the final judgment that God will consummate at a later time and cleanse the world of sin. The accumulated anger, according to Žižek's analysis, has gone from the Judeo-Christian tradition to the secular vision, where we must locate communism and fascism. With what has been said, we could ask what is the relationship between Benjamin's vision of violence and resentment?

When a subject is wounded so devastatingly that the idea of revenge according to *jus talionis* is no less ridiculous than the promise of reconciliation with the perpetrator once his guilt has been atoned for, all that remains is to persist in the "incessant denunciation of injustice" (Žižek, 2009, p. 225).

What attitude should be taken towards crime? There is a set of terms involved: resentment, forgiveness, punishment, and forgetfulness. They could be combined in different ways, one of them is "I forgive, but I do not forget"; Forgiveness has been granted in the perpetrator the feeling of guilt, says Žižek: the Freudian *super self*. Immediately relates God to the *super self*, the victim in a Freudian turn becomes guilty by taking the arrogant attitude of rising above the victimizer forgiving him and evidencing his guilt; therefore, God punishes him, for the pride that allows him to judge and punish



the guilty, his sin is to give forgiveness, rising with pride above the criminal, this alludes to the fact that only God can judge and punish:

Only God Himself (or, in stable terms, whoever stands on the cusp of power, the king or the president), thanks to his exceptional position, has the prerogative to erase the guilt of others. Our duty is to act according to the logic of justice and punish crime: not doing so entails the blasphemy of putting ourselves at the level of God, acting with his authority (Žižek, 2009, pp. 229-230).

God forgives guilt and only he can forgive it, hence any human must abstain from it. How to avoid falling into the sin of pride? Not assuming the role of God and for this the human must judge and punish and, once this is done, wait for the divine opinion for these acts, avoiding pride. What happens in the face of acts such as the holocaust, thinking that we have no alternative but what has been said:

[...] a crime so monstrous (the murder of European Jews at the hands of the Nazis) that the first three positions lose their impact. One cannot forgive, let alone forget such an act, but neither can they adequately punish it (Žižek, 2009, p. 230).

It is a limit situation that exceeds, according to Žižek, the human capacity for justice. In opposition to the Kantian categorical imperative, Žižek comments, it is not whether freedom in a noumenon or phenomenon, but: "[...] what is truly traumatic is freedom itself, the fact that freedom IS possible, and we desperately seek 'pathological' determinations in order to avoid this circumstance." (Žižek, 2009 p. 232).

Our own freedom causes us fear, it puts us in aporia, but this does not exempt us from trying to explain one of its consequences: violence. To think of pure violence as a leftist dream of revenge loaded with resentment, shown in historical events such as the French Revolution, the Paris Commune of 1848 or the Russian Revolution of 1917, will help to avoid seeking an explanation that resorts to the transcendent, to God. What is the role of God in the face of acts of this type of violence, Žižek refers to Benjamin, exposing a long quote that reflects on the commandment "thou shalt not kill", this commandment before the crime is committed, the human being knows that he is being



observed by God, who is attentive to events, is reduced to being a simple witness; after the action, for the human, strictly it is not possible to make a judgment on what happened, since the commandment is not a juridical criterion, it is a task that corresponds to God and only he can make a judgment; then kite:

This is the domain of pure divine violence that is the domain of sovereignty, the domain in which killing is not an expression of a pathology (idiosyncrasy, destructive impulse), nor a crime (or its punishment), nor a sacred sacrifice. It is also neither something aesthetic nor ethical nor religious (a sacrifice of the dark gods). So, paradoxically, divine violence overlaps in part with the biopolitical disposition of the *homini sacer*: in both cases, killing is neither a crime nor a sacrifice. Those annihilated by divine violence are fully and absolutely guilty, and are not sacrificed, since they do not deserve it or that some god welcomes them, but they are annihilated without any sacrifice. To lead a mere (natural) life (Žižek, 2009, pp. 234-235).

For Benjamin the purpose of divine violence is to put an end to mythical violence and law, this is what Žižek forgets or leaves aside (Bernstein, 2015, p. 115), this because he introduces from psychoanalysis the notion of resentment as a central axis for his interpretation, in this Bernstein emphasizes, who considers that Žižek limited his analysis to the case of mythical violence.

The absence of a perspective that allows us to visualize divine violence and that only the believer makes visible prevents us from identifying it, we do not know when it happens, so Bernstein disagrees with what Žižek proposes:

[...] one must fight it in solitude, assuming full responsibility for it. In other words, "divine violence" has nothing to do with outbursts of "sacred madness," with those bacchanals in which subjects relinquish their autonomy and responsibility, since it is a higher divine power that acts through them (Žižek, 2009, p. 237).

Divine violence is the purification, not of guilt for the crime committed, but of law and myth: "Divine violence is an expression of pure drive, of non-death, of excess of life, which strikes at the 'nakedlife' regulated by law" (p. 237). The difference between the holocaust and the revolution is that the



former remains as a means, that is, trapped in the means-ends strategy, while the latter should not seek a deep meaning:

[...] divine violence serves no means, not even the punishment of the guilty in order to restore the balance of justice. It is only the sign of the injustice of the world, of that world that ethically "lacks links". This, however, does not imply that justice has a meaning, but rather is a meaningless sign and the temptation we must resist is the one that Job successfully resisted, the temptation to provide a "deep sense" (Žižek, 2009, pp. 236-237).

God's intervention, through a violent act, is an example of what the final judgment will be, for Žižek it is a sign of the impotence of divinity, very different from the state of exception and the anarchic explosion. Žižek makes a point interpreting the French Revolution, whose protagonists set out to be so terrible that the people did not wish to be the protagonist of these actions, that is, it is a preventive act that performs the justice that the people desire, under the saying "the voice of the people is the voice of God". This is in the knowledge that the blame will remain on the responsibility and sovereign conscience of each revolutionary: "[...] it does not give the agent license to kill with a kind of angelic innocence" (Žižek, 2009, p. 239). At this point Žižek is more about Schmitt than Benjamin, according to what Bernstein says, and the examples he gives are related to the problem of anger, that manifestation of violence that characterizes his mythical modality (Bernstein, 2015, p. 115).

Divine violence belongs to the realm of happening, not judgment: "The risk of interpreting it and assuming it as divine is the subject's own thing: divine violence is the subject's labor of love" (Žižek, 2009, p. 240). For Žižek there is a paradox, the revolutionary is in a passion for the love he has for humanity and what he does is punish to correct his faults: "[...] love without cruelty is powerless; cruelty without love is blind, it is nothing more than a brief passion that loses its lasting edge" (2009, p. 241). This cruelty elevates their violent acts of correction above the merely human. Divine violence is an act of love, it is to correct what is wrong, that which endangers humanity, and those who are responsible and, therefore, enemies of the revolutionary must be loved; Žižek concludes that for Benjamin the domain of pure violence is the domain of love.



This act of love-hate does not free us from arbitrariness, although Žižek gives us some emotional elements in his analysis that accompany the actions of the subjects, reduces the perspective of divine violence to what Benjamin calls mythical violence, putting it in the tessitura of means and ends; that although he shares the fact of the manifestation, of the occurrence of violence, he does not overcome this point that is fundamental for Brecht's friend and that Bernstein emphasizes very clearly. The other point, the decision, which involves the agent of violent action, leaves him exclusively in the court of his individual conscience and loneliness, which for Bernstein must be brought to discussion in plurality and more rigorous analysis.

Deconstruction of violence

What has triggered in interest in Benjamin's essay, Bernstein states that the cause is Derrida's interpretation:

One of the main reasons why there has been a constant, almost obsessive, interest in the interpretation and reinterpretation of *For a Critique of Violence* is due, to a large extent, to the already famous, detailed, risky and extremely controversial deconstructive interpretation of Derrida in his text *Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority* (Bernstein, 2015, p. 116).

Derrida interrogates Benjamin's essay at an event that discusses Nazism and the "final solution," thereby placing him in a context alien, if not opposed to the place he has traditionally been given. Derrida's qualifiers powerfully draw Bernstein's attention to the ideas of the essay: restless, enigmatic, terribly wrong and obsessed with radical destruction, extermination, total annihilation and the annihilation of law and justice, the latter, insofar as it is the manifestation of Greek tradition and the Enlightenment. In the case of justice that derives from divine violence and that seems the only possible one, Derrida considers it not deconstructible because its nature is to manifest itself and can only be visible through revelation.



Derrida in his analysis of the text focuses his attention on Benjamin's signature that is embodied at the end of the writing. The relevant thing about the case is the importance that the name has for the Jews, according to Scholem they all receive a second name that they keep secret outside the intimate circles of Judaism, Benjamin received the name of *Angelus Santander* (Scholem, 2003, p. 77-81). Derrida says "[...] and it is the enigma of this signature of what I wanted to speak of" (Derrida, 2016, p. 70); of the signature and the contrast of the force that our philosopher puts in the divine or pure violence that suddenly annihilates and redeems. Derrida does not stop interpreting it as an obsession with extermination and total annihilation:

[...] obsessed with the theme of radical destruction, extermination, total annihilation, and in the first place the annihilation of law, if not justice; and among these rights, the rights of man, at least as these can be interpreted in a iusnaturalist tradition of the Greek type or of the type of the Aufklärung. (Derrida, 2016, p. 70).

This renunciation of justice and human reason as developed in the Enlightenment, the Greek and Western tradition, collapses the mechanisms for prosecuting the murderers responsible for the worst horrors. Deconstruction interrogates the texts to make them collapse in themselves, to make them fall into aporia; for Derrida, Benjamin's text, by removing or annihilating the only means to punish the guilty collapses in its claim to make the criticism of violence. The basis that is in Benjamin's thought is the Jewish tradition, the signature and the name place the Berliner as God's envoy who reveals the catastrophe to come, the apocalypse and the final judgment. This edge is not dealt with by Bernstein in his analysis of Derrida's interpretation, but Derrida is questioned by his own signature in the essay *Force of Law*.

As has been shown, Benjamin wants to prove that violence precedes the myth and the right that, when it emerges, the product of sin, divine justice comes in its wake, the pure violence that God opposes and that is radical, annihilating and redemptive. Continuing with Derrida, who considers that the "final solution" or that "nameless thing" that challenges the law of representation and that



demands the most erasable but demanding, which is the law of memory, how it could have a place in Benjamin's proposal.

Another issue that Derrida stresses is "[...] how the thought of the name is articulated with the obsession and logic of the spectrum" (Derrida, 2016, p. 71), an issue that leads us to responsibility, guilt, sacrifice, solution, punishment and atonement: "Zur Kritik der Gewalt is not only a critique of representation as perversion and fall of language but of representation as a political system of formal and parliamentary democracy." (Derrida, 2016, p. 71).

Benjamin's text, says Derrida, is located in the anti-parliamentary and anti-Aufklärung wave of the time, where Nazism stands out for its radical opposition. By identifying the vision based on representation as formal democracy and Aufklärung, where Greek thought is as antecedent, thereby renouncing the possibility of rational agreement either in its rational or mythical version, in terms of Benjamin.

When sin happened, the pride of Adam who tried to use the language that God gave him to name in the opposite direction and tried to create with him, thereby introduced violence into the world, human violence in its mythical or juridical manifestation, to which God opposed the violence of redemption. The post-Adamic language has in its germ the violence, Derrida commenting *For a critique of violence* says:

The profound logic of this essay carries out an interpretation of language -of the origin and experience of language- according to which evil, that is, lethal power, comes to language by way, precisely from representation, that is, through the re-presentative, mediating dimension, and consequently, technical, utilitarian, semiotic, informative, many other powers that drag the language and make it fall and end up far or outside its original destination that was the appeal, the nomination, the donation or the call of the presence in the name. (Derrida, 2016, p. 71).

The origin of myth and law comes from violence and this from the confusion of the name, which constitutes the center and foundation of language. Both myth and law have their basis in the act of



judging, of establishing the good and the bad, the just and unjust, the true and the false; this very human need requires judgment which is composed primarily of the name and, it must be said, primarily because the other terms used to form a judgment are subordinate to it. The name naming an object or phenomenon was established by agreement at a certain point in history and, in turn, will be changed into another agreement at a later time. Following this logic, violence may change and be different, but it will always manifest itself; the origin of violence is present to overcome it we must reestablish the function given by God to the name and, with it, the need to judge will cease.

What is controversial for many thinkers of Derrida's interpretation consists of the questions it raises:

What would Benjamin have thought, or at least what thought of Benjamin is virtually formed or articulated in this essay - and it is worth asking if it is anticipable - about the "final solution", his project, its implementation, the experience of his victims, the judgments, processes, interpretations, narrative, explanatory, literary representations that have been able to measure themselves with the thing? how would he have wanted the "final solution" to be spoken, represented or forbidden to be represented? How would he have identified her, assigned her place, her origins, her responsibilities (as a philosopher, as a judge or as a jurist, as a moralist, as a man of faith, as a poet, as a filmmaker)? (Derrida, 2016, p. 71).

These questions lead us to put Benjamin's text in a situation that most of his commentators omit. Considering that violence is inevitable and above all the high value it assigns to violence that annihilates in a single act, to that which it exterminates; Added to this is the idea of human intervention as a divine instrument in messianic acts. To highlight the point, it is relevant to put the criticism that Benjamin makes right to the place where he leads us: divine facts or acts within the framework of tradition.

Derrida recognizes that the difficulty of linking Benjamin's text with the "final solution" lies in his affiliation that his various interpretations regularly make with the messianic-revolutionary, in addition his suicide occurred in 1940, before the events of the holocaust, but despite this there are elements that allow this association. His proposal to read and interrogate Benjamin's text will run in



two directions: One. To look at the Jewish-German psyché and compare it with German thinkers, in this sense it is obligatory to contrast Benjamin with Carl Schmitt or Heidegger; as well as his opposition to Aufklärung and parliamentary democracy, for his interpretation of war, violence, language and his idea of destruction. Derrida points out that these thinkers, like Benjamin, are based on tradition and "authentic" memory. Two, the other side is to question the aporetic meaning of the text. Aporia that follows from his self-destruction, product of the violence of his signature, Emphasizes Derrida, of the divine signature:

But at the end of a text that manages to deconstitute and disqualify all the oppositions that it has carried out in a critical way (especially that of the decidable and the undecidable, of theoretic judgment and revolutionary action, of the founding violence and of conservative violence within mythological law, opposed to divine violent justice, etc.), at the end of a text that leaves no other content (theoretical, philosophical or semantic), perhaps no "translatable" content outside the singularity of its own event, outside its own ruin, a final sentence, an eschatological phrase names the signature and seal, names the name, and what is called "die waltende". (Derrida, 2016, pp. 76-77).

The ruling or sentence with which the text closes suggests that Benjamin had a mystical enlightenment, the visit of an angel who illuminated him and revealed to him the nature of violence. The phrase referred to by Derrida is the following: "Divine violence, insignia and seal, never a means of sacred execution, can be called, the reigning" (Benjamin, 2001, p. 45), and the enigmatic that Derrida emphasizes: it closes with the signature that is the name of our philosopher. The reigning violence, which is insignia and seal, is beyond human understanding, it touches the experience of Benjaminian mysticism. The secret name of Benjamin, which Scholem refers to us: *Angelus Santander*; the angel brings the good news, but this does not happen with Benjamin, on more than one occasion he brings the announcement of the catastrophe (Scholem, 2003).

For Derrida it is a play on words that randomly combine in the use of Walter and walken, we could venture that it announces the failure that reveals the will of God through the text of Benjamin. Dice Derrida is a signed and dated text; the date makes it distant in appearance from the "final



solution". This distance could make us think, gives rise to think, that the "final solution" is not in the origin or nature of Nazism, but that it was a contingent fact and that it may well not have happened. Derrida shows us that there are events that happen because there are thoughts that make them possible, that if we continue in that course it is natural that what is prefigured in the ideas happens; although it is true that there is no logical sequence that allows a thought to be followed by an action; however, there is some responsibility on those who encourage or encourage by their thoughts the specific facts.

Derrida, in what he called *Post Scriptum*, rehearses some ideas that Benjamin probably thought about the "final solution" starting that it was an inherent phenomenon in the logic of Nazism, but in an extreme situation. One, the radicalization was due to the fact that Nazism took the name to the extreme, that is, language reached the limit as an instrument. Two, the state of Nazism replaced the state based on parliamentary democracy and thereby founded the right that legitimized the "final solution". Three, the corrupt use of the police by parliamentary democracy to control the social maelstrom of the time reached its peak in Nazism with the "final solution." Four, myth and mythical violence are expressed in Nazism in its most finished aspect because it is mediated by the Aufklärung and the Hellenic tradition, says Derrida: "And Nazism was a conservative revolution of that right" (2016, p. 144).

For Derrida the "final solution", following the framework of Benjamin's text, does not have the trait of singularity since it links sin, decadence of language, violence, myth, law and police as a type of destiny, against its opposite that would link divine violence and messianism. Two types of destiny, but both under the seal of violence:

[...] one cannot think of the uniqueness of an event as the "final solution", as the extreme tip of mythical and representational violence, within its system. We must try to think about it from its other, that is, from what it has tried to exclude and destroy, radically exterminate, and that obsessed it both inside and out (Derrida, 2016, p. 145).



We must think about it from the singularity of the signature and the name, says Derrida, because it has tried to erase, together with the victims, their demand for justice and their memory in memory. In reference to different interpreters who have minimized what happened in the "final solution" or similar facts, they reach the limit of evil on two sides, justifying what happened as natural facts of war, since they are facts that happen regularly, as well as reducing them to legal facts that occurred in the context of legally justified State decisions and were natural consequences of the political contest, Derrida thinks:

From this point of view, Benjamin would have considered perhaps vain and irrelevant, in any case without relevance to the extent of the event, any legal prosecution of Nazism and its responsibilities, any judicial apparatus, any historiography that remained homogeneous to the space in which Nazism has developed will make the final solution, any interpretation based on philosophical concepts, moral, sociological, psychological, or psychoanalytic, and especially in legal concepts (in particular those of the philosophy of law, either Aristotelian style or Aufklärung style) (Derrida, 2016, p. 147).

This reflection allows us to see the consequences of following to the letter what Benjamin said, for whom law and justice, being based on myth and the State and, at the same time as what happened, have a common origin and foundation. This nullity that Benjamin attributes to these means to punish the guilty makes it impossible to do justice, you can not use instruments in whose germ they nullify themselves.

A text must be consistent with its own precepts and given the rejection of violence that gives rise to myth and law by Benjamin, it is inconsistent to apply justice, those who use them would exacerbate violence and injustice, this is the aporetic sense that Derrida underlines of Benjamin's text.

This alternative of fate, leads the human being to make a decision, to opt for the violence of law, myth and the police, on the one hand; while the other alternative is closed to him, messianism and divine violence:



This also means that the interpretation of the "final solution", as well as of everything that constitutes the whole and the delimitation of the two orders (mythological and divine), are not tailored to man. No anthropology, no humanism, no discourse of man on man, can be measured by the rupture between the mythical and the divine, nor, consequently, with that borderline experience that is a project as the "final solution" that tries purely and simply to annihilate the other of mythical violence, the other of representation, divine justice and what can bear witness to it, that is, man insofar as he is the only being who, not having received his name from God, has received from God the power and mission to name, to give himself a name to his fellow man and to give a name to things. (Derrida, 2016, p. 148).

This interpretation of the "final solution" as the annihilation of man, as God created him and gave him the language and task of naming, and who does not have the possibility to judge, since naming and representing are different actions and judgment corresponds to representation and not to naming. Judging would be only a representation, a fiction product of the lack of the name, of not knowing what happens as a fact. Hence, from Benjamin's text it is not possible to prosecute criminals or murderers without abandoning their mythical and legal basis.

For Derrida the text has elements that in themselves are rejectable, among which is his criticism of the Aufklärung, the theory of the fall, the original authenticity, his conception of language, the criticism of representation and representative democracy; but there is something that causes him more discomfort, he says I find it *fearsome, even unbearable*, it is:

That of thinking of the holocaust as an uninterpretable manifestation of divine violence in that this divine violence would be both annihilating, atoning and non-bloody... God's judgment strikes the privileged, Levites, strikes them without warning, without threats, fulminantly, and does not stop in the face of destruction. But God's judgment is also, precisely in destruction, purifying, atoning, and one cannot fail to perceive a deep link between the non-bloody character and the purifier of that violence. (Derrida, 2016, pp. 149-150)



Gas chambers and crematoria are non-bloody forms of extermination. What is maintained in the text, says Derrida:

[...] it is too similar, to the point of fascination and vertigo, to that very thing against what you have to actually think and think, against what you have to do and talk about... But if there were a teaching to draw, a unique teaching among the always unique teachings of murder, even if it is singular, of all the collective exterminations of history (for each individual murder and each collective murder is singular, and thus infinite and immeasurable) the teaching that we can draw today – and, if we can, we must – is that we must think, to know, to represent ourselves, to formalize, to judge the possible complicity between all these discourses and the worst (here, the "final solution") (Derrida, 2016, p. 150).

This obligation of every philosopher and man of letters is alien to Benjamin and Heidegger. Their thought sunk in tradition and their attitude of believing that they possess the certainty of living the authentic, original and founding experience, collapses and destroys any possibility of overcoming the condition where violence is the support and foundation of human life.

The thoughts that make up Nazism and that constitute it in its essence have many ways of manifesting themselves, one of them is the defense and the high value they give to tradition, in which framework they have the certainty that God has given them a task and that he authorizes them to take the lives of others. Perhaps we must abandon all tradition, along with its gods, whatever color they are and submit to precarious human reason.

For Bernstein, Derrida's interpretation does not discuss relevant issues, such as the precept "thou shalt not kill" and the example of Korah or Korah. He finds controversial the attribution of the indecidability that Derrida makes by putting in *aporía* the essay that closes and makes impossible the use of law and justice to judge the guilty, due to its affiliation to the tradition of the Enlightenment and the Greek-Western culture; on the other hand the impossibility of the unsure decidability of divine justice:

Derrida's conclusion about the various ways in which undecidability dwells at the very heart of both forms of violence is "consistent" with his own deconstructive



practice, since its purpose is to show that the apparent clear and "antithetical" distinction that Benjamin outlines between these two forms of violence is not as clear and distinct as Benjamin supposes [...] What is meant is that we never escape undecidability. (Bernstein, 2015, p. 120).

Bernstein replies that it would be necessary to question Derrida's signature in his text *Fuerza de Ley*, that is, deconstruct his signature, determine the place from where he speaks. In this sense the reading of Derrida that links Benjamin's essay to the final solution seems inappropriate to Bernstein, by the date of his writing, however, he considers that it is possible to do so, since it is "evaluative, prescriptive and non-constative [...]" (Bernstein, 2015, p. 121), therefore, Bernstein says:

Given the deconstructive conception of *undecidability* this reading is not accidental but *necessary*. Derrida is not saying that the temptation to adopt this interpretation follows from Benjamin's understanding of divine violence. But given the undecidability of Benjamin's text, we cannot exclude such an interpretation – or at least, the temptation to interpret divine violence in this way – (Bernstein, 2015, p. 122).

Holocaust allows us to reflect and set in motion questions and our thinking, but it is still imagination. For Ricardo Forster the interpretation of Derrida is tortuous, he says we must not forget that Benjamin thinks of catastrophe in relation to hope and moves between both poles, destruction and its possible overcoming (Forster, 2014, p. 432). Benjamin was in favor of seizing power as Lenin had proposed and realized, not of democracy (p. 442); therefore it is a fallacy to transfer a thinker from the 20s to our time (p. 443). Although Forster takes into account the influence of Jewish tradition, he reduces it to mere adornment that accompanies the thinker in his intellectual production; in that sense every idea brought from tradition is neutral, has no weight in the thoughts and actions of men.

Divine violence as a cultural revolution



Axel Honneth, like Bernstein, in his essay *The Rescue of the Sacred from the Philosophy of History. On Benjamin's "critique of violence"*, tries to provide his reader with the elements that formed the circumstances in which Benjamin wrote his essay, which he considers endowed with "[...] a subtlety that profoundly confuses" (Honneth, 2009, p. 101). Considers that there was at the time of writing a discussion on the legitimacy of violence where concerns about law, history and religion converged; to which we must consider that Benjamin was highly influenced by cultural circumstances. From very early on, Honneth affirms, Benjamin thought that the strong influence of utilitarianism, which was the origin of all kinds of evil, should be overcome by reducing to the means-ends scheme the determining actions of human life, to which he opposed a position that fought for a religious decisionism. He thought that God and language, as literary criticism and literature later will be, were actions that did not fall into the means-ends scheme.

His readings of Bloch, Sorel, Unger, Peguy, Schoen and friendship with Scholem (Cf: Scholem, 2014), who despite their differences between them shared in common the rejection of utilitarianism, impel him to go further and seeks to clarify the idea of experience, which he finds limited in Kant, the philosopher summit of the Enlightenment and that Benjamin appreciates, but he considers his conception very poor on this decisive point. Benjamin was very close to the political action motivated by the pauperization generated by capitalism, immobilized life and the case of Palestine; he went from viewing politics from a certain intellectual aristocracy to sympathizing with the proletariat (Cf: Honneth, 2009, p. 106). This fact Honneth values it to a large extent because it anticipates what has been called the conception of the Frankfurt School; but at that time: "[...] discovers in the political the structure of a purpose in itself of a religious character" (p. 107).

Unlike what is commonly thought about the relationship between violence, politics and law, Benjamin reverses this order:

[...] all rational politics finds its limit in "violence" and has instead its legitimate starting point in "law". In his article, Benjamin attempts nothing less than to reverse exactly the poles of both concepts in terms of their meaning, so that "violence" seems as a source and basis, and law instead as a term of politics. (p. 107).



Before law or politics, violence is the foundation, it happens and is the basis and foundation. For Honneth, Benjamin's critique is a radicalization of that made by Kant. Experience is the thread that leads to a refoundation of the order of criticism, even of knowledge. Kant had established the Copernican turn, but he stopped at the subject-object relationship that never exceeded its instrumental condition, which Benjamin sought to overcome by broadening the gaze of experience, bringing it to consciousness to its communicative and religious dimension: "[...] We must take into account the plane of experience that does not fit in the classical scheme of subject-object, but exceeds its instrumentalism in one direction or another" (p. 108).

Violence is the efficient cause of law and myth, it manifests itself as soon as it affects the morality of the human being, as soon as it modifies his praxis of life. Honneth draws attention to the fact that Benjamin excludes male violence, intra-family violence and its presence in gender issues; Natural phenomena such as earthquakes or eruptions of volcanoes are also of their attention:

Benjamin's definition must be understood more strictly in the sense that only coercive powers that not only intervene "in a moral situation" but are also endowed with moral validity are conceived as "violence"; consequently, Benjamin limits himself in his study to the analysis of forms of violence that have sufficient moral legitimacy to be able to impose moral transformations on a society. (p. 109).

This deep moral sense that Benjamin gives to violence links him to responsibility and human freedom, therefore, perhaps, the criticism of violence must be understood as his philosophy of history, because it falls on the human decision. The first task, although insufficient, is to know how these guidelines are applied to know the internal meaning of the events of an era, even if with this, the corresponding value judgment is not reached. An external perspective is necessary to see the variations of a historical epoch. The latter is necessary to be able to see the negative features of an era, to see the events of history without value judgments. One fact is that God is absent from this age for Benjamin,



he withdrew and will return, this intermission is marked by corruption and sin. For Honneth our thinker wants to place himself in a place to see the events, so he makes one:

[...] exhortation to place oneself at a moment in history that lies beyond the obfuscation context of the present; because only from that transcendent vantage point can one effectively recognize where the guidelines or distinctions currently practiced failed or fail. (p. 111).

This objective look that Honneth tries to show, but does not say so clearly, like Bernstein, is Jewish tradition. Thus the terms that Benjamin uses to observe the world are: establishment of law, preservation of right, pure form of divine creation that Benjamin calls pure violence; he also uses two figures, one divine and one human. Trying to synthesize the path of criticism, according to Honneth for Benjamin is to go from experience to ethics, from this to history, to show the tasks or functions of history that we can think of as concepts and from these to the figures from which the whole becomes: man and God:

Now, Benjamin believes that he can really arrive at the judgment of "value" of these distinctions only by placing himself in the perspective of another era, of a "new" epoch, of which here in principle it is only named as the most outstanding quality of derogation of law; although in the last paragraph the expression "divine" for that future period is found several times, what is decisive for the normative intention seems to be the fact that with the right the predominance of means and ends will also be extinguished. (p. 113).

For Honneth, in Benjamin's thought, it is seen that the right is reduced to simple calculation, product of capitalist reification, this brings him closer to Lukács who was based on the distinction of form and content, while Benjamin focused his criticism on the reduction to the means-ends scheme, typical of utilitarianism, as well as to the opposition between morality and right that Sorel defended. This last thinker profoundly influenced Benjamin, who assumed that the social order required legitimation and that he sought it through the exercise of the right, this guarantees security to the privileged social class and thus shows the clarity of his conscience. This opposition between class morality or ideology, which utilitarianism provides to the privileged, versus the real, authentic morality, which corresponds



to the oppressed, constitutes the tension of views of the time. While Lukács supposes that the problem is the abstraction or empty formalization of law, for Benjamin, based on Sorel, the problem is the reduction to utility, at the end of each thing or its instrumentality (Cf. Honneth, 2009, p. 115).

Honneth turns to the jurist Jehring, who was well known at the time of the essay's writing, to make sense of Benjamin's ideas. The jurist supposes that the law must guarantee the living conditions of society, but it has become an institution that guarantees the domination of the privileged, opposing the voluntary altruism of the intersubjective morality that influenced Brecht's friend and that could be alien to violence. Human egoism, typical of capitalism, needs social order to avoid conflict, that is, the help of authoritarian forces. The relationship that Benjamin inverts allows us to see violence as what happens, that utilitarian reason is located in its explanation in the means-ends scheme and that it is the justification of violence to preserve order, therefore, this task of justifying constitutes the substance of law. The law is an instrument that naturalizes violence, this reduction allows Benjamin to recognize that there is sanctioned violence and unpunished violence. The great criminal is punished because his violent acts open the possibility of establishing a new legal order, "the law of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" would have the possibility of being established if the State does not punish it. The general strike of workers is punished by the State, so that the workers do not impose conditions alien to those previously established on work, even when the partial strike is legally permitted, this shows the contradiction in which the legal order falls. The same happens with the war between nations, which ends up modifying the established by introducing new conditions to the international context. Regarding the general strike, as Benjamin puts it to Honneth, seems fragile and implausible.

Honneth thinks that Benjamin's examples, to exemplify the violence that he retains entitlement, such is the case of the death penalty, do not obey the means-ends scheme that is the basis of his thesis. Police violence is above the foundation and preservation of the legal order; it is gloomy, unnatural and humiliating violence, the degeneration of which in parliamentary democracy becomes more evident. For Honneth, Benjamin puts the specifics of his time as if it were valid for all ages, highlighting that democracies have given other ends to the police.



The future location that allows the objective vision of Benjamin, transcendent vision of all morality that he calls "pure" and that will link to non-violent forms, from which contracts and parliamentary systems are excluded. Honneth attributes to Benjamin an aversion to the parliamentary system, which places him very close to Schmitt's position, but considers it to be "[...] a comment thrown on the sidelines" (p. 128). The options in the face of violence are "the emotional 'virtues' that allow one to penetrate with the other by adopting their perspective." (p. 128) These affections are pure and could be added to the "culture of the heart" that would allow social agreements and diplomacy for negotiations. The proletarian general strike, following Benjamin Sorel, puts it as a pure non-violent means because it executes subversion:

[...] this amazing twist in argumentation is that it seems to add up ambivalently; because "pure" can almost no longer or can no longer mean "free from violence", but has to mean something like "devoid of purpose", that is, the execution of an action by the action itself. (pp. 129-130).

You are not oblivious to violence you are only outside the ends, with this Benjamin seeks a vision of an era beyond the law:

In the displacement recognizable there is expressed in which direction Benjamin will seek in the last part of his article a form of violence that is no longer part of the "magic circle" of the "life situations" dealt with so far and that is therefore free from the relationship means ends of law: that violence, of which the conditions given the proletarian general strike is an exemplary symbol, it can no longer continue to serve as a means to moral ends, but must itself be the expression and form of the execution of morality (p. 130).

This execution of morality is pure violence. The violence of the legal order cannot be justified because it lacks legitimacy, its legitimacy of the means is in contradiction with the justice of the ends. There is violence that only happens, just like anger, this type of violence is alien to the law, it is the product of a will. There are then two types of violence, the one that is linked to the means-ends scheme, typical of the law, and the other, the one that only manifests itself and that is composed of mythical violence



and pure violence. However, mythical violence, which is the basis and foundation of legal violence, fulfills its same function:

And here we have in view for the first time the whole table of categories on which Benjamin based his study from the beginning as a hidden normative scheme; although the concept of "divine violence" had already appeared by the meaning on the previous page, only now can one see the eminent importance it has to conclude the argument as a whole. (p. 134).

With this we can understand, according to Honneth, why the critique of violence is his philosophy of history: "At this point it is not difficult to see that Benjamin has introduced the central concepts of his treatise in a chronological order that is in inverse relation to its objective or historical importance" (p. 134). We could say that the idea of the first sin is missing so that pure or divine violence emerges from there, which seeks to correct the evil introduced by Adam's pride. By wandering alone, full of pride, man judges his own violence and that judgment allows him to give it a mythical and juridical meaning, alien to clean and pure means:

If we now imagine this genealogical axis as a scheme, as a column of concepts at the end of which is the category of immediate violence "*impure*", we will also have to imagine in parallel a second commune of concepts that serves to record a completely different genealogy, because at the extreme is located the category of immediate violence "*pure*". (p. 135).

This pure and immediate violence can only be executed by God given His good and just will. There is for Honneth an order of exposition that goes from the right to divine violence through myth, however, the process is inverse with respect to the ontological order. In the age of law there have been manifestations of divine violence, which is why they appear in the historical evolution. Benjamin seems to mean that God's violence is similar to that of parents, guardians, or teachers who seek good from whom they rebuke.

Politically, says Honneth, Benjamin presents us with a weak, intermittent continuity of pure and immediate violence as it shows that revolution is inevitable, but stresses, he does not think of



armed subversion but of a cultural revolution, whose impact would overthrow the legal relations of the system as a whole:

Benjamin is convinced that from this spell of law can only ultimately liberate us a revolution that produces justice immediately, in a sacred way, through the execution of violence. It is not surprising that a writing with such content, whose concept of law is terrorist, whose ideal of violence is theocratic and whose idea of revolution is eschatological, until today has essentially consisted of minimizing, hoarding or biasing interpretations (p. 138).

For Benjamin, morally only divine violence can free us from the fatality of law, Honneth asserts, but a cultural conversion could be envisaged, even if the text clearly suggests violence as the only means.

A relevant point of Honneth is that he tries to reconstruct the context in which Benjamin's essay was written, but he does not go beyond the immediate to the text, he does not go to the Jewish tradition that has an enormous weight in the ideas that make up the writing. Eduardo Maura Zorita complements the interpretation of Honneth, whom he follows carefully in his commentary, by adding the theological influence on the political debate and which had a strong impact on the conformation of the ideas of the essay (Benjamín, 2010a).

Bernstein is convinced that humans must avoid violence, that it should not be one option among the many that arise in the course of our lives, that help will come from our ability to think, where dialogue with the other necessarily is, that we incorporate their ideas and their interrogations as an essential part of our reflection. With this he is close to what Honneth affirmed, it is about revolutionizing our mind so that instead of colliding with another he incorporates it as something fundamental to our life, for this Bernstein has a precious resource: fallibilist pluralism. This disposition will help to face difficulties that involve us with others and that are necessarily an essential part of the solution. Recognizing that there are other ways of thinking helps us learn from them, but this requires that we leave behind what prevents us from this approach, that is, leaving aside the railings that hinder and determine our prejudices.



As an epilogue we could extract the following:

- For Bernstein the nodal point of an adequate interpretation of Benjamin's text is in the problem of decision, this does not contradict the different visions that other thinkers have about the essay, rather it reinforces them and allows us to see singular details about each of them. The high point is in the different interpretations of divine violence.
- In the case of Žižek it is shown as a very forced interpretation for trying to justify the use of violence for the construction of a more just world. The problem lies in determining at what point violence can be resorted to and if once the violent acts were carried out they were absolutely necessary and if we managed to avoid further damage. What baffles Bernstein is that Žižek reduces the court of conscience to be carried out alone and individually on the deliberation of facts, this is where fallibilist pluralism is necessary, which drives to seek its valuation in plurality, without prior conceptions and which can help to reduce possible errors. Resentment is certainly present in human actions that seek justice, but with it is linked to the scheme of means-ends the interpretation of violence, which was just what Benjamin tries to overcome as Bernstein points out. Taken together, these observations Bernstein makes of Žižek are valid for Butler's and Critchley's versions.
- In the case of the interpretation of Derrida, who seeks a task close to Bernstein, to question the texts, to bring them to their aporetic sense, but maintains a greater rigidity in his judgment, less dialogical, perhaps the deconstructionist thinker failed to have the attitude of fallibilist pluralism as a background attitude. Although Bernstein does not reject the imaginary exercise of seeking Benjamin's views on the holocaust as Derrida does, he nevertheless finds the link that the French thinker tries to establish between divine violence and the "final solution" exaggerated. The difference of both thinkers lies in tradition, Bernstein starts from the events closest to the origin of the essay, as well as Honneth, while Derrida wants to make visible the Jewish conception that is in the background in Benjamin's thought and, above all, denounces that there are ways of thinking and thoughts that by their nature are consistent with violent facts and events. The latter coincides with Bernstein's idea that there are different



mentalities that can collide, this in relation to cataloging the other as the embodiment of evil, creating a rhetoric of justification to be able to attack and exterminate it, from this the fallibilist pluralism frees us (Cf. Bernstein, 2006). In both cases, deconstruction and fallibilistic pluralism are in tension with mentalities that put the stranger, the other, as the embodiment of evil, shielding from the pernicious ideas that come from tradition.

- Gillian Rose, Dussel, Salinas Paz, Ortega Esquivel, among many others, using Honneth's expression to refer to Marcuse's interpretation, minimize Benjamin's thought; they make the Berliner say that "messianic revolution" is the struggle of the oppressed against the powerful, when what is sought is the struggle against sin in all its manifestations. There are two points in my opinion valuable in Benjamin's text, first to think of violence independently of any context of justification, that is, as fact, as what happens; to be able to focus it morally. How is violence morally justifiable? Obviously the answer is no. Violence should not take place in the world in any of its manifestations. For Benjamin there are certain resources that start from individual virtues through agreements outside the legal contracts, behind this idea is the name, which is vital in the Jewish tradition, preserves some of what it had in previous times lent and with that weak light illuminate, give strength to the word that commits the parties, to seal the compromise between them; this needs, even if it seems contradictory, according to Benjamin the idea of not punishing lies and deception. Even if it does not say so, but it seems that there would be a function similar to what God does with the commandment "thou shalt not kill" and we would have to think that he observes human activities as a mere spectator knowing that he has said "thou shalt not lie". Benjamin marginally extends this possibility to other forms of agreement, to those that are group or diplomatic agreements, this would make us think of proposals such as the coalescing theory of the argumentation of Michael A. Gilbert (Cfr: Gilbert, 2017) that proposes mechanisms so that the difference of ideas silks and agreements can be reached; this is far from the idea of Benjamin, who rejects argumentation as the appropriate means to this end and considers that the way is divine



revelation through the name, mysticism that overflows the capacity of human. These points are valued by Bernstein and to a large extent his philosophical proposal runs along this path.

- The non-violence in Benjamin's writing does not have the force that violence has, it is reduced to the "culture of the heart", to the agreement outside the legal framework between individuals who trust in the word committed, it would be supported in clean means of non-violent conformity and to preserve that purity it must take care not to fall into the means-ends relationship of the law. This weak but essential form of Benjamin's text fully coincides with the intention of Bernstein's philosophizing.
- It follows from Benjamin's text that violence is inevitable, it is inherent in the life of human beings, yet it is not in their nature. Violence occurs because man judges, disqualifies the actions, thoughts and feelings of others. The act of judging comes from the ignorance of the human being; this is because he lost the name that names things and facts, this lack forces him to issue opinions without support, without referring to what really happens and, therefore, to act accordingly, to perform clumsy and lost actions, hence he has to use force and commit acts of violence to adjust the world to his ideas and thoughts. These adulterated and equivocal facts need to be justified in order to have a harmonious and rational place, hence the importance of judging. The only way to overcome this condition will be at the final judgment, when God re-establishes what was lost by original sin, returning to the name its essentiality. Bernstein does not refer to any of this, but his proposal of pluralism fallibilism will help ignorance, but above all that which prevents overcoming it, to decrease and regardless of whether there is a final judgment and surely this will contribute to reduce violence. But the most important thing is that they propose a way to judge those who cause harm with violent acts, in such a way that it does not fall into arbitrariness.
- Divine violence is read in different ways: revolution of the oppressed, non-violence, resentment of the victims, anticipation of the final judgment, impotence of God, cultural revolution, etc., what motivated Benjamin's reflection was to overcome utilitarianism, according to Honneth, to thought stuck in representation and with it in the Aufklärung,



according to Derrida, unmask the deception of unjust justice, according to Salinas Paz, etc., but the problem of the decision is common and nodal point as Bernstein affirms, independently we would like to know Why a human being decides for the violent option? Perhaps we should ask about the *ethos* of those who interpret, as Bernstein does with Derrida, who asks for Benjamin's name and signature. There is an *ethos* involved in the interpretations that gives an alien and partial air to each interpretation of the essay, each interpreter has to take care of his prestige, but also the totemic force of the name Walter Benjamín.

- Following Dewey, Bernstein is a supporter of democracy as a way of life, a system of government that encourages and nurtures the participation of its citizens, which is inherent in their daily lives, but what Derrida said, which also bets on parliamentary democracy and the law based on the Aufklärung, was that Benjamin thought negatively about all kinds of government and in particular about that. Honneth has stressed that Benjamin's intention is to be able to observe events from a non-violent era, alien to the instrumental rationality of law, where the participation of the members of that world can, for the value of their word, reach agreements outside legal forms, such as contracts and parliamentary deliberation, which characterizes today's democracies. How to reconcile Benjamin's position against parliamentary democracy and the law, with the position of his interpreters, where all of them in one way or another seek a system of government that we could call "democracy"; in a second moment, except for Derrida and Scholem, they all dialogue with Benjamin without considering the strength that exists in their thinking of the Jewish tradition, they consider it part of the Western tradition, when he maintains a categorical rejection of it.

Life, as natural or biological life, is not sacred, therefore it has no value, it is a resource that can be exterminated according to Benjamin; only the just life, and just in the eyes of God, is worthy of being cared for. The serious thing about this idea is that it is founded and comes from a tradition, the value is predetermined in that cultural-religious framework, in the case of Benjamin by Judaism. In an aporetic sense, if we follow the thought of our philosopher to stay in the concrete, in the singular



and in the facts; from which all tradition is still left out, only naked life remains, the strictly biological, outside of it nothing, no soul, no spirit, no sacred, only life, which is the only thing that can suffer violence. But in a different sense to what has been said, the idea of concreteness for Benjamin comes from the name that is the spiritual essence that God used to create the thing, the thing is the name itself; in our case it is life that happens as a singularity, even if it has no name, because there is no one who pronounces it or gives the breath, the breath.

References

- Benjamin, W. (2001) *For a Critique of Violence*; Madrid; Taurus Publishing House; Trad.: Roberto Blatt.
- Benjamin, W. (2007) *Concepts of philosophy of history*; Buenos Aires: ed. Terramar; Trad.: H. A. Murena and D. J. Vogelmann.
- Benjamin, W. (2010a) *Critique of violence*; Mexico City; Gandhi editions; Trad.: Héctor A. Murena (revised by Eduardo Maura Zorita).
- Benjamín, W. (2010b) *Obras, Libro II/vol. I*; Madrid; Abada editors; Trad.: Jorge Navarro Pérez.
- Benjamin; W. (1986) *On the Program of Future Philosophy and Other Essays*; Mexico City; Editorial Artemisa (Planeta de Agostini S. A.); Trad.: Roberto J. Vernengo.
- Bernstein, R. J. (2006) *The Abuse of Evil. The corruption of politics and religion since 9/11*; Buenos Aires; Katz editors; Trad.: Alejandra Vassallo and Verónica Inés Weinstabl.
- Bernstein, R. J. (2015) *Violence. Thinking without railings*; Barcelona; Gedisa editorial; Trad.: Santiago Rey Salamanca.
- Bojanić, P. (2010) *Divine Violence in Benjamin and the Korah Case. Rebellion against Moses as the first scene of messianism*; Revista Acta Poética #31-1 (January-June); trad. Miriam Jarabe.
- Corona, J. (2018) *Constellations and force fields in current critical theory*; Guanajuato; Eon Editions.
- Derrida, J. (2016) *Force of law. The "mystical foundation of authority"*; Madrid; Editorial Técnos; trad.: Adolfo Barbera and Patricio Peñalver Gómez.
- Forster, R. (2014) *The crossing of the abyss. Evil and modernity in Walter Benjamín*; Buenos Aires; Economic Culture Fund.



- Honneth, A. (2009) *Pathologies of reason. History and actuality of critical theory*; Buenos Aires; Katz Editions; Trad. Griselda Mársico.
- Karmy, R. (2005) *Mythical violence and naked life in the thought of W. Benjamín*: Revista A Parte Rei. Journal of Philosophy #39.
- Lizarazo, D. and Sánchez, J. A. (2012) *Benjamín y las encrucijadas de la violencia*; Mexico; Editorial UAM Xochimilco.
- Muñiz-Huberman, A. (1993) *The roots and branches. Sources and derivations of the Hispano-Hebrew Kabbalah*; Mexico City; Economic Culture Fund.
- Scholem, G. (2003) *Walter Benjamin and his angel*; Mexico; Economic Culture Fund; Trad. Ricardo Ibarlucia and Laura Carugati.
- Scholem, G. (2014) *Walter Benjamin. Story of a friendship*; Trad.: J. F. Yvars and Vicente Jorque.
- Sorel, G. (1978) *Reflections on violence*; Buenos Aires; Ediciones la pléyade; Trad.: Luis Alberto Ruiz.
- Žižek, S. (2009) *On violence. Six marginal reflections*; Buenos Aires; Editorial Paidós; Trad.: Antonio José Antón Fernández.
- Gilbert, M. A. (2017) *Arguing people understand*; Guadalajara; University Press; Trad. Fernando Leal Carretero.
- Salinas, F. (2018) *200 years with Marx*; Guadalajara, CUCSH-UdeG editions.