

Chapter 1

“Military Intelligence”

Coalition Enforcement and the Evolutionary Origin of Morality and Violence

1.1 Philosophy: The Luxurious Supplement of Violence

In the paper “Philosophy – The luxurious supplement of violence”, Bevan Catley (2003) says

In many of the growing number of accounts of workplace violence there exists a particular sense of certainty; a certain confidence in what violence “really” is. With these accounts, philosophy appears unnecessary – and even luxurious – in the face of the obvious and bloody reality of workplace violence. [...] one outcome is an absence of a sense of curiosity about the concept of violence in many typical commentaries on workplace violence. Through a turn to philosophy it is suggested, we might possibly enquire into other senses of violence that may otherwise be erased. However, weary of simply “adding” philosophy, this paper also begins to sketch out some possible consequences a philosophy-violence connection might have for doing things with philosophy and organisation.

Workplace violence is only a marginal aspect of the widespread violence all over the world but I agree with Catley that philosophers usually do not consider this theme; he says they lack a “curiosity” about violence: this book aims at further filling this gap.

Similarly, in a recent book about the relationships between phenomenology and violence, which mainly addresses the problem of war, Dodd (2009, p. 2) says:

It might strike one as a strange point of departure for a reflection on the obscurity of violence to raise the question of its properly philosophical character. Does not virtually any obscurity, not to mention profound questions of human existence, by definition invite philosophical reflection? This already begs the question. For perhaps it is instead the case that the problems of violence are not, in the end, all that obscure, even if they may be difficult to understand.

Furthermore, the existence of a conviction about a kind of stupidity of violence is illustrated:

In its barest form, the stupidity of violence principle states that violence is and can be only a mere means. As a mere means, pure violence remains trapped, according to the

principle, within the confines of a very narrow dimension of reality defined by the application of means. Violence as such is thus blind; when taken for itself it is ultimately without direction. The practices of violence, however traumatic and extreme, fade into indefinite superficialities unless supported by a meaningful cause or end. To be sure, the stupidity of violence does not detract from the seriousness of the consequences of violence, the damage it inflicts – the shredded flesh, the famine and disease, the pain both physical and spiritual, and the shocking number of corpses that it leaves in its wake. [...] violence is stupid, in that it involves nothing more significant than what can be captured and organized in a technical fashion. [...] Likewise, the morality of war does not find, according to this principle, any chance of being expressed, so long as we only follow along the passage of the event of violence that has been so tightly reduced to this line of cause to effect (Dodd, 2009, pp. 11–12).¹

The lack of curiosity is accompanied by a sense of certainty about “what violence is”, Catley says, and I agree with him. There is a sense of certainty that suppresses its historical variability² and that only leaves a hypocritical sense of it as a merely deplorable outbreak on an otherwise peaceful scene. “Philosophy, it would seem, appears unnecessary – and even luxurious – in the face of the obvious and bloody reality of workplace violence” (ibid.)

In sum, we do not only need philosophers of science or moral philosophers but also “philosophers of violence”. I also strongly believe that the problem of violence is no less important than the problem of morality and I plan to show how the two are strictly intertwined.³

1.1.1 *Individual and Structural Violence*

A kind of common prejudice is the one that tends to assign the attribute “violent” only to physical and possibly bloody acts – homicides, for example – or physical injuries; but linguistic, structural, and other various aspects of violence also have to be taken into account. However, even homicide itself is more complicated than expected, in fact recent research on the legal framework of homicide and on its biological roots shows many puzzling aspects. Brookman (2005) contends that it is not appropriate to think of homicide just as a kind of criminal or violent behavior, because the phenomenon is complex and socially constructed for the most part.

¹ Various classical philosophers concerned with the meaning of war and violence are usefully analyzed in the book: Arendt (multidimensional and subjective character of violence); von Clausewitz and Schmitt (political instrumentality of violence and “constitutive” violence); Heidegger, Sartre, Nietzsche, and Jünger (non-instrumentality and nihilism of violence); Patočka (violence and responsibility).

² Cf. also (Keane, 1996).

³ However, a new focus of attention on violence in philosophy seems to be “in the air”. Very recently McCumber (2011), in “Philosophy after 9/11”, has stressed the need to reshape research in philosophy (and its related community) from various perspectives, for example defending Enlightenment, beyond the mere use of the “[...] standard arsenal of argument forms, of which our Analytical colleagues make excellent though wrongly exclusive use” (p. 28). The paper is part of a collection with the eloquent title *Philosophy and the Return of Violence* (Eckstrand and Yates, 2011).

Those who kill do so for very different reasons and under different circumstances, and some structurally originated killing is often hidden and disregarded, even from the legal point of view, such as in the case of multiple homicides perpetrated by corporations. He illustrates various explanations of homicide: psychoanalytic and clinical approaches, accounts from evolutionary psychology or social and cognitive psychology frameworks, sociological and legal aspects and the biological roots of killing.⁴

The extension of the meaning of the word violence brings up the need to reconsider our concepts of safety, ethics, morality, law and justice. May be the philosophy-violence connection (with the help of other related disciplines, both scientific and cognitive) will generate novel ideas and suggestions. Of course people and intellectuals are clearly aware that drug, alcohol, revenge, frustration, and mobbing behaviors are related to violent events, and so many aspects of linguistic and structural violence are acknowledged, but this acknowledgment is almost always fugitive and superficial. In sum, we see the spectacle of violence everywhere, but, so to say, the violence always out there, involves *other* human beings and we can stay distant from the theme of violence by adopting a simple and familiar – but practically empty – view of it. Indeed, it is implicit that, if we know for certain that we are the possible target of violent behavior, we *a priori* think of ourselves, spontaneously, as exempt from any contamination, in our supposed purity and immunity. We just hope not to become victims, but this is usually considered just a question of good luck, and, above all, we are not interested (even if we are, or think of ourselves as, philosophers) in analyzing the possible existence and character of *our* own (more or less) violent behavior. It is better not “to problematise our confidence in, or familiarity with, ‘what violence is’ ” (Catley, 2003).⁵

Familiarity with violence involves a trivial and simple *sense* of violence as interpersonal, physical, and illegitimate, which can be clearly seen in the case of workplace violence as a:

[...] deviant set of behaviours to be eradicated through a series of familiar strategic interventions. Workplace violence becomes reduced to a technically rational set of “procedural issues about workforce selection, early detection of potential troublemakers, adequacy of liability insurance, risk management and effective exclusion of potential as well as actual offenders” [...]. And it is this familiarity that erases questions about the constitution of violence that might lead us to ask other critical questions about the organisation of work and the work organisation beyond individual pathography. Arguably, the familiarity of violence as interpersonal and illegitimate has encouraged explanations of workplace violence to focus on the individual and the eradication of such deplorable behaviour. In these explanations, the focal point has tended around the exposition of the personality and motivations of the “perpetrator”, typically with a view to profiling the violent individual (Catley, 2003).

⁴ On the psychological explanations of mothers killing their children see the recent (McKee, 2006).

⁵ Further details about the concept of structural violence, the problem of its possible legitimization, and the relationship between violence and justice in the case of “just war” are illustrated in (Coady, 2008, chapters two and three).

The passage is clear and eloquent. Violence tends to become an easy matter for psychologists, sociologists, etc., who make – sometimes vane – efforts to depict the structural aspects of situations and institutions and how they change (families, markets, nations, prisons, workplaces, races, genders, classes, and so on). However, what really matters is to describe how individuals respond in a dysfunctional way because of their personality, motivation, and (lack of) rationality. The full violent potential of structures, artifacts, institutions, cultures, and ideologies is marginalized and disregarded. For example we rarely acknowledge the fact that contemporary humans can – with scarce awareness – damage the future as well as the present causing future populations to be our “unborn victims”, thanks to the consumption of energy, the pollution of air and water, or the demolition of cultural traditions. It is only the “abnormal” individual that is seen as prone to suddenly perpetrating violence, and only (right wing?) repressive policies that are considered extinguishers of the violent anomaly.

To summarize: it is the individual that is violent, but the inherent violence of structures (where for example injustice and relations of dominations are common, and violent attitudes are constantly distributed and promoted) is dissimulated or seen as a “good” violence, in the sense that it is ineluctable, obvious, and thus, acceptable. Every day in Italy at least three workers die in their workplace, and this seems natural and ineluctable. The potential harmfulness of organizational practices and workplace management leads to violent events and are rarely seen as causing them. When they are seen as violence-promoters, this consideration is a kind of “external” description which exhausts itself thanks to a huge quantity of hypocritical rhetoric and celebration. Again, we tend to focus on the familiar idea of violence as basically physical and we ignore or belittle other aspects of violence which neither leave their mark on the body nor relate back to it.

In his recent book Žižek (2009) reveals “the hypocrisy of those who, while combating *subjective violence*, commit *systemic violence* that generates the very phenomena they abhor” (p. 174). Language and media in modern life continually show a spectacle of brutality accompanied by a kind of urgent (but “empty”) “SOS violence”, which de facto systematically serves to mask and to obliterate the symbolic (embedded in language, as I will amply illustrate in the second part of this chapter and in the following one) and structural-systemic violence like that of capitalism, racism, patriarchy, etc. Žižek provides the following, amazing example of the intertwining between charity and social reproduction of globalized capitalism: “Just this kind of pseudo urgency was exploited by Starbucks a couple of year ago when, at store entrances, posters greeting customers pointed out that almost half of the chain’s profits went into health-care for the children of Guatemala, the source of their coffee, the inference being that with every cup you drink, you save a child’s life” (p. 5). The instantiation of this hypocrisy is clear when analyzing the philanthropic attitude of what Žižek calls the *democratic liberal communist capitalists*, who absolve themselves as systemic violent monopolizers and ruthless pursuers of profit thanks to an individual policy of charity and of social and

humanitarian responsibility and transcendental gratitude. Žižek also warns us that a cold analysis of violence typical of the media and human sciences somehow reproduces and participates in its horror; also empathising with the victims, the “overpowering horror of violent acts [...] inexorably functions as a lure which prevents us from thinking” (p. 3).

Another aspect of structural violence can be traced back from the analysis of the commodification of sexuality in our rich capitalist societies. The urgency of sex tends to violate the possibility of love and the encounter with the Other:

Houellebecq (2006) depicts the morning-after of the Sexual Revolution, the sterility of a universe dominated by a superego injunction to enjoy [...] sex is an absolute necessity [...] so love cannot flourish without sex; simultaneously, however, love is impossible precisely because of sex: sex, which “proliferates as the epitome of late capitalism’s dominance, has permanently stained human relationships as inevitable reproductions of the dehumanizing nature of liberal society; it has essentially ruined love”. Sex is thus, to put it in Derridean terms, simultaneously the condition of the possibility and of the impossibility of love (p. 9).

To make another example, harassing, bullying, and mobbing are typical violent behaviors that usually involve only language instead of direct physical injury: that is, blood is not usually shed. Bullying can also be ascribed to such a category, but in a somewhat minor dimension since bullies often resort to both physical and linguistic threats. Of course, the sophisticated intellectual and philosopher – but not the average more or less cultured person – says “certainly, mobbing involves violence!”, but this violence is *de facto* considered secondary, at most it is only worth considering as “real” violence when it is in support of actual events of physical violence. It is well-known that people tend to tell themselves that the mobbing acts they perform are just the same as cases of innocuous gossiping, implementing a process of dissimulation and self-deception.

1.1.2 *Psychiatrization and Dehistoricization of Violence*

A strategy that aims at weakening serious attention to violence is often exploited by the media (and is common in everyday people). The mass media very often label episodes of violence, for example terrorism, as something pathological: “the terrorists kill for the sheer pleasure of killing and dying, the joy of sadism and suicide”, “they constitute a pathological mass movement”. Following Wiewiorka (2009, p. 77) we can say that these considerations only serve to obscure any hidden causes for the “horrifying attacks” and represent a form of medicalization or *psychiatrization* of a behavior that comes to be dismissed as simply insane.⁶

Another strategy that aims at playing down the problem of violence consists in labeling some violent episodes as “new”, in a kind of “ahistorical individual pathology” where organizations and collectives are considered simply “affected”

⁶ On the relationships between psychiatry and violence cf. below, chapter five, section 5.2.

by violence, and certainly not part of it. Here is an eloquent example: “To represent workplace violence as a ‘new’ event serves to deny and evacuate any historical relationship between violence and work. This is not to suggest that the ‘object’ of workplace violence has remained constant throughout time, but to inoculate against any imagined sense that violence has not been present in the organisation of work”(Catley, 2003). We know that this last statement is patently false just like in the case of bullying in schools – often marked as “new”. Catley nicely concludes: “Consequently, the result of accounts of workplace violence that distance themselves from viewing workplace violence as historical and sociological in favor of an ahistorical individual pathology is a continuance of the representation of the organization as being *affected* by violence rather than possibly *contributing* to, constructing or reproducing violence” (ibid.)⁷

A meaningful recent analysis of the so-called “deadly consensus”, which is at the basis of UK workplace safety is provided by Tombs and White (2009). The authors document the regulatory degradation as a result of its compatibility with neoliberal economic strategy. The degradation is justified by political and economical reasons, which rapidly become the *moral* grounds at the level of the individuals’ legitimacy in disregarding safety. A subsequent analysis of empirical trends within safety enforcement reveals a virtual collapse of formal enforcement, as political and resource pressures have taken their toll on the regulatory authority. Furthermore, an increasing impunity with which employers can actually kill and injure (even if they do not *mean* to, as the end of their action) is also observed.

1.1.3 *Victims and Media*

In sum, we can say that in a common sense (as it emerges, for instance, in the mass media) the representation of violence is really partial and rudimental. In our current technological globalized world media and violence live in a kind of symbiosis (Wieviorka, 2009, p. 68) – just think about terrorism – this presents two aspects: the first is that victims are continuously exhibited and described, and this is positive, because they are not simply disregarded as collateral, like in the past, but are increasingly represented in the violence that they have suffered and which has damaged their moral and/or physical integrity. One can at least think “that the thesis that violence is functional loses its validity” (p. 160) since an effective depiction of violence halts the belief that violence has a (more or less) just reason and a reasonable scope. The second aspect is concerned with what the victims are like, so to speak, the “words” the journalists depict them with, and the fact that the subjective side of the victims is rarely presented, favoring empathy and the sense of the

⁷ Amazingly, empirical research showed that in Australia around 26% of workplace bullying can be attributed to the 1% of the employee population, representing “corporate psychopaths”. Corporate psychopaths, like toxic leaders, cause major harm to the welfare of others, trigger organizational chaos, and are a major obstacle to efficiency and productivity (Boddy et al., 2010; Boddy, 2010).

audience's psychological incorporation of the actuality of violence.⁸ Thus a culture of fear is favored but, at the same time, violence may be unintentionally promoted and reinforced.

In intellectual settings, with the exception of literature and arts, and of other – so to say – more or less “technical” disciplines (theory of law, religious studies, some branches of psychology, sociology, psychoanalysis, paleoanthropology, evolutionary psychology, evolutionary biology, and criminology), the lack of curiosity for violence is widespread and violence is basically *undertheorized*. In the case of “technical” disciplines an interest in violence is very recent. As interestingly noted by Gusterson (2007), when – starting from the 1980s – “new wars” and local processes of militarization with high civilian casualty rates came about in Africa, Central America, the former Eastern block, and in South Asia, anthropologists showed a greater interest in various kinds of violence: a kind of “cultural turn”, Gusterson says. They started to analyze terror, torture, death squads, ethnic cleansing, guerilla movements, fear as a way of life, permanent war economy, the problem of military people as “supercitizens”, war tourism, the memory work⁹ inherent in making war and peace, and also the problem of nuclear weapons and American militarism. They also stressed the role of current military apologetics in the USA, which favored and still favors degraded popular culture saturated with racial stereotypes, aestheticized destruction, and images of violent hyper-masculinity. In this perspective of a new widespread militarism (as a source of so much suffering in the world) it can be said that the “war on terror” has provided the occasion for a new intellectual commitment to the theme of violence debating the merits of military anthropology versus critical ethnography of the military. However, we have to say that all too often, especially in psychology and sociology, the analysis of violent behavior is exhausted by the description of the more or less vague characters of various psychopathological individuals or groups, where empirical data and practical needs are the central aim, but deeper structural and theoretical aspects are disregarded, while they could be crucial to a fuller understanding and subsequently to hypothesize long-term solutions.

1.1.4 *Philosophy and Violence*

I strongly agree with Catley that philosophy can become a “catalyst” for “energizing” our thinking about the multifaceted aspects of violence. However, we have to remember that of course “philosophy in the forms of its philosophical institutions and practices may too exert its own forms of violence. Rather than standing in

⁸ On the need to construct, in “existentialist” critical criminology, a new concept of “event”, as a guiding image able to offer an alternative approach to victimization, trauma, and identity cf. the interesting (Spencer, 2011, p. 49): “Trauma resulting from events of victimization can transmogrify singularities both in terms of their bodies and possibilities. Each singularity experiences selfhood in discrete ways and their histories are not reducible to selfsameness. This refusal of selfsameness moves victimology beyond the assertion of ‘the victim’ of a type of crime, to the plurality of experiences connected to manifold events of victimization and their attendant effects”.

⁹ A collective mobilization of memory about past injuries.

opposition to violence, philosophy may well reproduce that which it seeks to condemn. The faithful love of ideas harbors an affair with violence” (Catley, 2003). It is obvious that philosophy can afford to explore the problem of violence only if choosing a side to stand on; philosophy has to be aware that, given the inherent violent nature of knowledge and language I will soon illustrate in this book, it is not immune to it, and that every option chosen has the chance of producing violent effects. For example “Here one might think of the institutionalization of philosophy, where what is included and excluded in the canon is decided. Or the silencing effects of truth, where ‘truth’ is mobilized to close down dissenting positions. Philosophy becomes complicit in the sorts of domination enacted when the arbitrary takes on the status of the natural to close down alternative ways of knowing, courses of action, and subject positions in order to preserve dominant relationships of power” (ibid.): to make an example, how can we forget that often the presentation of a sophisticated philosophical argument about “creation” is experienced and “perceived” as a tremendous violence by some religious and/or uncultured people?

As I have already said in the preface to this book, philosophy has always displayed a tendency to “dishonor violence” by disregarding it. Step by step the philosophical intellectual commitment to violence has become more and more objective and abstract and is being transformed into an autonomous subject of philosophical reflection. Now we can say that philosophy has learnt to *respect* violence and – so to speak – its “moral dignity” as a philosophical topic.

An initial theoretical step in this book is to acknowledge that, often, structural violence is seen as *morally* legitimate: we have to immediately note that when parents, policemen, teachers, and other agents inflict physical or invisible violence on the basis of *legal* and/or *moral reasons*, these reasons do not cancel the violence perpetrated and violence does not have to be condoned. In chapter three¹⁰ of this book I will describe how a kind of common psychological mechanism called “embubblement” is at the basis of rendering violence invisible and condoning it. Human beings are prisoners of what I call *moral bubbles*, which systematically disguise their violence to themselves: this concept is also of help in analyzing and explaining why so many kinds of violence in our world today are treated as if they were something else. Such a structural violence, which is in various ways legitimated, leads to the central core of my commitment to the analysis of various relationships between morality and violence.

It seems to me there is an increasing interest in the intertwining between morality and violence in concrete research concerning human behavior. For example Smith Holt and colleagues (2009, p. 4) contend that there is a common thread that emerges in various recent studies about killing: “[...] something about moral code, a religious or ethical belief enmeshed within a cultural context, determines one’s stance on various types of killing and, indeed, on inhibitors to killing”.

A philosopher I recently found to explicitly (seemingly, at least) acknowledge the strict link between morality and violence is Allan Bäck. He first of all contends that aggression is not necessarily a destructive or morally bad act:

¹⁰ Cf. subsection 3.2.2.

In contrast to aggression, I shall thus take “violence” in the basic sense to signify a certain sort of aggression, namely an aggressive activity to which judgments, of being good or bad, apply. In many moral and legal theories, such judgments require, among other things, considering the conscious of the moral agent(s). According to such views, if you are aware of what you are doing, will to do so, and could do otherwise, you are morally responsible for those acts. You might, then, be able to do something without being morally responsible, if you did not will the act, or were not aware of what you are doing, or were in a mental state of extreme duress or emotion. At any rate, I shall suppose that normal cases of human intentional action are subject to moral judgment and are chosen (Bäck, 2009, p. 369).

From the perspective of the perpetrator an action is violent when it is aggressive, it is “chosen” and when the victim would not want to suffer that harm (i.e., “the action unjustly violates the rights of the victim, where ‘rights’ signifies the morally ideal set of entitlements that the recipient of the action – typically a person – ought to have”). In such a way violence “contains” a moral component that “is associated with choosing to engage in actions that harm another person and attempting to force that person to act as you want”. In this basic sense

1. violence – from the perspective of the perpetrator – is the fruit of moral deliberation (always endowed with its “idealistic” and “pure” halo),¹¹ but
2. usually, when we judge a human act to be violent we mean something *pejorative*, we need to add the condition that the selected choice is morally wrong, the agent ought not have made that choice. It is clear that this judgment of violence is of second order and derives from a moral judgment that usually does not belong to the perpetrator; indeed I strongly think the case of a perpetrator that consciously performs violence, by disobeying to *his own* moral conviction, is a rare case of a real mephistophelian behavior. It is clear that the second meaning of violence tends to *obliterate* the first one: we always forget that violent actions are usually performed on the basis of moral deliberations.

Taking advantage of some philosophical and interdisciplinary considerations, my aim is to attribute more sense to violence: I will link violence to a number of issues including ethical, juridical, cognitive, and anthropological ones. The following are the three first steps: 1) a definition of violence is required; 2) we need to emphasize how we can shed light on morality and violence through the so-called *coalition enforcement* hypothesis; 3) we have to deepen our knowledge about the moral and – at the same time – violent nature of language (for example, but not only, in the case of speech acts). I will consider these issues in the following sections illustrating the useful concept of *military intelligence*. To anticipate the content taking advantage of a kind of motto, I can say: “when words distribute moral norms and habits, often they also wound and inflict harm”.

¹¹ (Baumeister, 1997).

1.2 Defining Violence: Violence Is Distributed and Always "Perceived" as Such

People, and especially analytic moral philosophers, usually ask for definitions. We can try to offer a definition of violence. Disregarding here the well-known definition of evil as a supernatural phenomenon, which is interesting from other cultural perspectives, we have to face its nature in terms of human and interpersonal relationships. First of all I can say that violence is always perceived as such directly by an individual (who eventually derives that way of perceiving from the shared culture of the group(s) to which he belongs): "The same act can count as violent or non-violent, depending on its context; sometimes, a polite smile can be more violent than a brutal outburst" (Žižek, 2009, p. 180). Furthermore, Taylor (2009) has recently emphasized the need – from an evolutionary perspective – to involve morality, at least as far as the definition of violence is concerned. She suggests that cruelty is a concept that has meaning only in the context of morality, and morality is an evolved property possessed only by humans (and rudimentarily by our closest evolutionary neighbors, as contended by many evolutionists and animal-cognition researchers). She contends that what is perceived as cruel is dependent on context and culture. Why, for instance, is targeted assassination by dropping a one-ton bomb from a plane on to the house of an alleged enemy not cruel, whereas a suicide bomber who immolates himself together with his victims is cruel?¹²

I have contended in the previous section that aggression in itself is not necessarily violent: a surgeon that causes pain to a patient by ordering chemotherapy is not violent in the "pejorative" sense of the term (and indeed that aggression is not perceived by the recipient himself in a morally pejorative sense). The mechanism of attribution of violence to an act, a situation, an event varies between cultures and approaches, and the judgments can be more emotional and less conceptual or vice versa.¹³ Of course there are aspects of violence (like in the case of death from a bloody aggression, or in the case of incest) that are almost universally shared across cultures; even if we have to remember that, for example, those who commit suicide do not perceive killing themselves as an actually violent act, to them their tragic death is considered

¹² A full analysis of the concept of cruelty is given by Randolph Mayes (2009). The author defies the idea that cruelty is widely regarded to be a uniquely human trait, which follows from the received definition of cruelty as involving the intentional infliction of suffering together with the empirical claim that humans are unique in their ability to attribute suffering (or any mental state) to other creatures. It is argued that the intuitive appeal of this definition "[...] stems from our abhorrence of cruelty, and our corresponding desire to define cruelty in such a way that it is almost always morally wrong. Scientifically speaking this is an arbitrary condition that inhibits our attempt to study cruelty as a natural phenomenon. I propose a fully naturalized definition of cruelty, one that considerably expands the range of creatures and behaviors that may be conceived as cruel" (p. 21).

¹³ Cognitive researchers have provided empirical evidence pointing to the fact that to metaphorically define or frame the issue of crime using the image of a predator yields systematically different suggestions with respect to those produced when crime is described as a virus, cf. (Thibodeau et al., 2009).

a relief. Moreover, killing oneself or killing others is often morally justified thanks to political or religious reasons both by the suicide/killer and by his group.¹⁴

1.2.1 *Decent Violent People*

Another important issue is related to the fact that human beings experience a pervasive difficulty in understanding perpetrators of evil. It is well-known that Hannah Arendt famously noted that the fact that normal, banal, decent people could commit violent and more or less atrocious acts, seems

[...] to go against one’s basic understanding of the world. Some exceptional explanation must be required, because it seems that evil deeds should be done by evil people, and yet many such deeds are committed by people who do not conform to the stereotypes of evil. Yet these stereotypes are one of the major obstacles to understanding evil. This is ironic, because the myth of pure evil was constructed to help us understand evil – but it ends up hampering that understanding. The myth is a victim’s myth, and there is often a wide, almost impassable gap between the viewpoints of victims and perpetrators (Baumeister, 1997, p. 379).

Furthermore, thanks to the scientific research of the last few decades it is now clear that aggression, far from being an obvious exclusive instinctual endowment of human and non human animals, is mostly “learned” and specific to particular situations. Culture plays a great role, like the carnage of the last century clearly demonstrates, paradoxically showing that an increase of civilization has also increased some forms of violence.

Evil requires deliberate actions of one or more persons (or the unintentional intrinsic action mediated by an artifactual social structure), the suffering of another person, and the perception or judgment of either the second person or an observer.¹⁵

¹⁴ An analysis of various aspects of suicide is given by Joiner (2007): he finds three factors that mark those most at risk of death: thwarted belongingness, morally perceived burdensomeness, and the ability for self-harm. More data and analyses about violent aggression are given in (Gannon et al., 2007). The chapter by Palmer (2007) clearly teaches how moral reasoning often contributes to aggressive violent behavior, through its interaction with a range of other social cognitive processes: the author acknowledges that moral reasoning and other social cognitive variables act as a mediating factor between socialisation experiences (particularly early parenting styles) and aggressive behavior. The biological counterpart (genes, neurotransmitters, hormones, neurological impairment) of aggression – verbal, physical, sexual; with or without a weapon; impulsive or premeditated – is dealt with in (Nelson, 2006).

¹⁵ Not every evildoer is an evil person but there is empirical evidence that a very large proportion of us is inclined to perform evil actions: following the detailed study illustrated in (Russell, 2010), which critiques the dispositional account of evil personhood, *S* is an evil person if *S* is strongly disposed to perform evil actions when in conditions that favor *S*’s autonomy.

Basically, it is the moral “perception”¹⁶ human beings possess and activate which delineates “what is violent” and the effect of “victimization”, but perceptions are variegated and likely to change. If I morally think incest is “bad”, I can perceive incest as a violent sexual act; if I think patriarchal life is good, I can label women that rebel as violent/bad; but if I am a woman that rebels against patriarchal mentality, and so who adopts and activates a different morality (for example “feminist”, or simply informed by the legal norms of Western societies), I am the one to perceive the patriarchal male behavior as violent/bad. To give another example, if I think that retaliation is morally good, I morally approve of the act of *killing the killer* by capital punishment. The patent violent aspects “we” – as people who do not agree with the death penalty – perceive in this action disappear insofar as we are individuals that morally endorse this kind of retributive revenge. What I will call the *moral bubble* is still operating:¹⁷ obviously the retaliators see the performed violence “phenomenologically”, as just a justified aggression, which is not morally considered a violence and so it can be disregarded as such. On the contrary, we have to repeat, the same action of killing the killer is usually seen as profoundly violent by people that do not “morally” favor the death penalty and retaliating by killing. In general the two groups conflict, and the conflict can in turn also become violent, as I will more clearly illustrate in the following section.

1.2.2 *Honor and Institutional Cultures*

Another example of conflicting moralities can be traced back from the distinction between “honor cultures” and “institutional cultures”.¹⁸ These cultures present various conflicting ideas for example about moral responsibility and desert and about punishment. Honor cultures favor revenge and thus pay more normative attention to the offended party, so that they stop – via some kind of retaliation – feeling outraged or resentful: such practices are aimed at preventing further abuse, disgrace, ostracism, decrease in status for both oneself and one’s family. Conversely, institutional cultures favor retributive behaviors and discourage retaliation against

¹⁶ I am taking advantage of the word perception in the general sense of the term, as an equivalent of judgment, feeling, reaction and so on, for example the reaction can derive from more or less “educated” emotions, or from more or less rational judgments, still related to the individual’s hard-wired cognitive endowments and to his present plastic learned cognitive capacities, and of course from a mixture of both.

¹⁷ Cf. chapter three, subsection 3.2.2.

¹⁸ (Sommers, 2009). Lately, even psychologists and cognitive scientists interested in moral behavior (always reluctant to abandon the ethnocentric prerogative of “morality” according to the one imbedded in monotheistic religions or in modern civil mentality) acknowledge the fact that also honor and other cultures are characterized by *ethical* concerns. For example (Gigerenzer, 2010, p. 545): “Terrorists, the Mafia, and crack-dealing gangs run on moral principles (e.g. (Gambetta, 1996)). [...] I suggest that the heuristics underlying moral behavior are not the mirror image of the Ten Commandments and their modern equivalents, but embody more general principles that coordinate human group”. Further insight on cultures of honor in southern United States, from an evolutionary psychological perspective, is provided by (Shackelford, 2005).

defectors, because of its significant costs and risks, and so normatively focus on the offender and his persecution (the offender has to be punished to deter him and others from cheating again).¹⁹

Both cultures incorporate moral behaviors that aim at enhancing cooperation, researchers contend that the honor cultures are typical of herding and frontier societies, but their characteristics “[...] may be present in inner city gang life, some tribal societies, outlaw and mafia cultures, and other types of environments as well” (p. 39), while the institutional ones are typical of agricultural communities and, in general, they are incorporated in strategies intended to promote the fitness of large groups. In this last case – often characterized by centralized forms of law-enforcement – massively discouraging free-riding is crucial for the interests of the whole group, not just for particular individuals, as it is in the case of honor cultures. It is from this perspective that Boyd, Gintis, Bowles and Richerson (2003) call the punishment exerted in these cultures “altruistic”, which involves little sacrifice on the part of the punishers. In conclusion, honor cultures privilege the morality of retaliation while institutional cultures stress moral responsibility and desert.

Looking at honor cultures through the morality we are accustomed to (that is, as twenty-first century, Western human beings, citizens of well-established democracies), or through the abstract concepts of moral philosophy compels us to miss their intrinsically *moral* aspects. Of course I agree with Sommers, some honor killings are not perpetrated by moral monsters, like in the following case:

This is when a family member murders a woman or girl because she has lost her virginity, which is seen as a stain on the family’s honor. What makes these cases even more unfathomable is that often the murdered woman is a victim of rape. Most groups in Western cultures find this perspective not just appalling but utterly bewildering. Even if one believes that premarital sex is a mortal crime, how can anyone think it is appropriate to punish victims of rape? It is clearly not the rape victim’s fault that she committed this “crime” and lost her virginity. The phenomenon becomes a little easier to understand if we imagine that the cultures that support this behavior do not have a strong notion of desert to begin with. If that is the case, it is almost irrelevant that the victims do not in any way deserve their fate. Note that in many cases, the family members are not moral monsters; they are often consumed with grief at the death of a beloved daughter or sister. But they will seldom repent the act. We might imagine that family members regard victims of rape as a fatal illness. That is why tremendous grief is consistent with a complete lack of repentance for the killings. The injustice of these deaths does not resonate to members of honor cultures nearly as much as it does to those of us in institutionalized cultures (Sommers, 2009, pp. 42–43).

¹⁹ It is worth noting that honor cultures – the mafia can be considered a fitting example – contrarily to law-enforcement cultures, do not pay attention to the “[...] whole concept of responsibility and, in particular, the ‘deservingness’ of the offender. [...] The important thing is that the injured party retaliates against someone, someone who bears a connection to the offender. Otherwise, honor is lost. Of course, [if, for instance, the offense is a murder] the most suitable target is the murderer (as long as he is of equal status to the victim). But there is no prohibition against punishing relatives or associates of the offender, since the primary function of retaliation is to restore the reputation of the offended party” (Sommers, 2009, p. 42).

Moreover, it is important to stress the fact that people certainly share common objective moralities and systems of values (collective "axiologies", as I will describe in chapter four), that are widespread and dominant in their group/groups, but also possess individual moralities that they use on occasion, often related to subcultures that endorse violence. Baumeister (1997) usefully notes that various subcultures – more or less widespread and implicitly carried by mass media and moralistic gossip – of the supposed morality of the *irresistible impulse* constitute a subcultural morality that favors and justifies much violence.²⁰ An example: I can adopt in certain circumstances a modern morality, inspired by legal/civil norms, that does not contemplate mobbing, but at the same time I can adopt – more often without any awareness – in some other circumstances, ancestral different moralities,²¹ like the scapegoat mechanism, and I can become a mobber, implicitly believing (contrarily to my legal/civil convictions – still present, but disengaged) in the basic morality and rightness of mobbing. In such cases of momentary mobbing behaviors, performed by otherwise "decent" people, the moral bubble is still operating, and so no awareness of the violence perpetrated against the mobbed individual is present, even if everyone knows that those same decent people who mob others do not like themselves being mobbed and would feel violated and harmed in the same case. Actually, moral bubbles seal an agent (the mobber, in this case) against self-contradiction and keep her calm and satisfied with having applied a presupposed – momentarily felt as such – morality.

The variety of moralities (and so the legitimacy of ancestral protomoralities, which interrupt and substitute a "civil" morality) has been recently acknowledged by a few authors interested in going beyond the abstractness of moral philosophy. For example, Sommers, whom I have already quoted above, considering the case of the concept of "moral responsibility" in the "honor" and "institutional" cultures, clearly notes:

Some beliefs might be more or less rational within a particular environment, but no theory can describe the truth about responsibility in all environments. [...] At the very least, a defender of a universal condition-based concept of moral responsibility will have to answer the following question: why should the notions of moral responsibility and desert have any more objective or metaphysical status than the notions of honor and dishonor? If we are to say, with Kant, that it is an objective truth that a criminal deserves to suffer for his crime, then why should we not say that a family is truly dishonored, again in an objective sense, when they do not avenge a wrong committed by another tribe or individual? (2009, pp. 48–49).

From this perspective moral philosophers such as Mackie (1990) appear gracefully candid and abstract when they contend that while we may find disagreement about a wide range of moral issues, we also find cross-cultural agreement about certain central ethical principles:

These principles [...] may then be applied in different ways depending on the culture; but the principles themselves – the "don't harm unnecessarily" principle, for example

²⁰ Cf. chapter five, section 5.1, this book.

²¹ We can call them *protomoralities*, if we frame them in the light of modern, civil or post-biblical moral tradition.

– are universally accepted. This objection might seem plausible regarding some moral values, but if my observations are correct, there is simply no widespread cross-cultural agreement about core principles of moral responsibility. Honor cultures have a diminished notion of deservingness, and what appears to be a vastly stripped down control condition, which institutionalized cultures consider to be the very essence of moral responsibility. And what principle could be more fundamental to Western notions of moral responsibility than the claim that only the culpable, only those who had control over their actions, deserve blame and punishment? (Sommers, 2009, pp. 47–48).

Furthermore, Sommers correctly notes that the two cultures are often intertwined in a particular community, so that the motive of honor and the motive of moral responsibility and desert are in reality the opposing ends of a continuum: “Naturally, there will be overlap – a notion of honor in institutionalized cultures, and a notion of moral responsibility in honor cultures” (p. 44). This further supports what I have illustrated above, concerning the fact that various subcultures (for example the honor subculture which still lives inside a dominant institutional culture) can constitute a subcultural morality that individuals can occasionally adopt, thus performing acts that appear “moral” in the light of that subculture, and “violent” in the light of the dominant culture. The following is an example: often honor morality is comfortable with the killing of a person that is not directly responsible for the offense that must be vindicated/punished, but is just somehow related to that offense (for instance because she is a relative, a friend or a partner of the offender): such a retaliation is immediately seen as an immoral crime in the light of our dominant morality of responsibility and desert.

A useful cognitive analysis of punishment is illustrated in a recent cognitive research.²² The authors contend that there are three different systems of norm enforcement: revenge, punishment and sanction. Revenge is more related to social rituals, as a reaction to aggression, to make the aggressor’s suffering repay the damage, and to deter further aggressions by changing the target’s belief: it is scarcely institutionalized; punishment is still related to the deterrence of the offender, now considered as responsible, but also to *righting* the wrong in a possible retributive regime – more or less proportionate to the offense – to repay the damage; sanction, still a deterrent and retributive tool, also aims at *pedagogically* modifying the belief of the target by referring to an objectified established *norm* – social (justice), legal, or moral – and it is thus detached from the punisher’s will.

I would note that some of the described aspects are often intertwined and so the useful distinction above would have to be rendered more dynamic, for example, often punishment in terms of revenge is inserted in a law, still in effect in a modern constitutional democracy. In Italy, a law, abolished in 1981 (that is, about thirty five years after the birth of the constitutional republican democracy) embodied the persistence of an archaic, patriarchal honor culture of revengeful punishment against the “offense” of unlawful sexual relations or other more violent crimes. For example, Article 587 of the law, part of the Rocco Code introduced during the Fascist regime, granted the reduction by one third of the penalty for retaliators who killed their wife, daughter, or sister to “save” the honor of their family. In detail, Article

²² (Giardini et al., 2010).

587 of the Italian Rocco Code enabled consideration of the “cause of honor” in homicide or physical injuries, providing: “whoever discovers unlawful sexual relations (i.e. sexual relations outside marriage) on the part of their spouse, daughter, or sister and in the fit of fury occasioned by the offense to their or their family’s honor causes their death, shall be punished with a prison term from three to seven years”.²³

1.2.3 *Defining Violence*

My friend and young colleague Jeffrey Benjamin White contends that moral perception typically has to do with how a person feels/thinks/judges that the world as a whole *should* be. He is right. He also adds that, what a person perceives demands a consistent account of all related things. Of course moral bubbles obey a kind of human exigency of ethical consistency – even if contingent: where, morally speaking, “inconsistent” a person ends up in a moral bubble, so that the inconsistency itself is not really “perceived”.

The reader could suspect I am endorsing here a kind of moral relativism, to avoid dogmatism and ethical absolutism. This is not the case. I would say that I take advantage of a simple naturalistic approach, since I trust the results of scientific knowledge: exact and human sciences (and especially cognitive science) teach us results about perception, language, judgment, consciousness, etc., which also provide empirical and theoretical knowledge about the actual moral, violent, and criminal behavior of human beings. Of course science too adopts ontological constraints, but we have to remember that scientific knowledge changes and new ideas arise, so that the ontological presuppositions change too. Therefore, here naturalism is preferable to relativism.

In this naturalistic perspective human beings are embedded in *cognitive niches*²⁴ that – among other things – shape them both culturally and morally. They just behave as they can, depending on various constraints and limitations, biological (intelligence, sensitivity) and cultural ones (learning processes, information and available knowledge, etc.): how can we see deviance in this perspective? Deviance is a strong word and in general, reciprocal areas of deviance are individuated simply because different moral perspectives tend to consider each other as contrasting.

For example, let us pay attention to the moral taboo consisting in the prohibition of incest: following my relatively straightforward naturalism, a human organism seems to be wired to regard incest as “violent” because, if allowed, practiced and socially encouraged the resulting world would be the opposite of the one evolution has made us feel, think and judge as *right*. So it seems that evolution favors non-incestuous behaviors. All of this can be grounded in the evolution of the organism, to maximize survivability conditions, through individual actions, for every human group in the world as a whole. The world resulting from the practice of incest, in effect, would exist in a sort of alternative “morality”, which lives in a kind of

²³ On the political and social role of legal punishment in modern states cf. (Hoskins, 2011).

²⁴ Cf. chapter four, this book.

potentiality being closed off to the agent as a morally permitted end to his action. But this alternative is very often activated and made real, like psychoanalysts teach us, and perceived by their endorsers as fair. Sexual incest is narrowly practiced but, more important and extremely widespread, narcissists can be typically “incestuous” (or “incestual” like Paul-Claude Racamier (1995) says) persons (even if not from the direct sexual point of view): they are persons who engage in a kind of relationships with parents, sons, and relatives, where the *incestual* character is clearly seen in the spontaneous perversion of the main command/prohibition. Those who are the object of incest are in turn *de facto* violently exploited and “treated only like a means”, so that it is appropriate to see them as victims – but the narcissist, actually, does not perceive them as victims at all and perceives his behavior as moral and legitimate. Psychoanalysis sees these behaviors as ranging from pathological ones, where it is difficult to attribute a fully normal deliberative responsibility to the involved actors, to perfectly healthy ones, where the perpetrators responsibly choose the incestuous (or *incestual*) behavior, trusting its rightness and moral appropriateness.

In sum, even if incest can be classified as a possible maladaptive behavior from a strict Darwinian point of view, incest and incestual relationships can happen as they *actually* happen, trusted and justified by their participants. Moreover, since it is unlikely that cognitive/moral niches do evolve according to the strict Darwinian scheme, the maladaptive character of incest can be questioned too. Incest (and its psychic sub-products: incestual and incestuous) can substantiate individual moral attitudes, which do not necessarily result from a psychopathological/clinical background, which further guarantees the, so to say, “contingent” prosperity of individuals or small groups, at the expense of others who are more or less violated and exploited, for a limited lapse of time.

Let us see other evidence of the interplay of multiple moralities, and its interest from an evolutionary perspective. Jeffrey Benjamin White, the friend of mine I quoted above, continues

Persons feel/think/judge that certain acts are morally permissible when in fact they seem contrary to survivability of both individual and group. For instance, consider the Chinese one-child-per-family practice. This practice has been proposed, recently by a Canadian writer as a possible solution to global energy/pollution/resource problems, as it has proven effective in China. However, her proposal has been met with anger, even ridiculed, by Canadians. In other words, perceived as “violent”. Of course, there has been resistance to the practice in China, as well, but generally the attitudes there are different. The basis for these differences are thought to be a combination of both evolved neurology and enculturation. Western people typically focus on individuals as the most salient features of situations, while Eastern people tend to focus on the situations, themselves. Thus, weighing the situation above the self, the one-child-per-“my”-family policy is better received amongst most Easterners, while the same proposal is immediately dismissed by most Westerners. Of course, one can tell an evolutionary story about the source of these perceptual differences, this is easily done and quite solid. Even the individual deviations from enculturated norms can be derived from evolutionary accounts, as cultural norms and artifacts tend to reinforce lessons from natural evolutionary pressures, and individuals deviate from such when the instigating pressures are no longer perceived. So, in any event, this is not the issue. The issue is

that global pressures are not immediately perceived by any individual organism, and not immediately represented in any single culture, in any event! In fact, to respond to these pressures requires an idealization. In fact there seems to be two families of responses to these pressures. One focuses on the group, and the situation, and so maximizes global survivability. The other focuses on the individual, at the expense of the group, and so maximizes local survivability. For either, there are consequences. First, to pursue one is to endorse it, and not to endorse/pursue the other. Thus, one is defined as “mine” and “ours”, and – consistently – the other as alien, if not sacrilegious. Second, from this it follows that there is something very active about morality, and very troubling for purely evolutionary accounts thereof, in the sense that we create the world, not merely respond to it.

The picture provided by Benjamin White is very interesting because it focuses on conflicting moral views. Before these conflicting moral views and deliberations my comment to the observation above further rejoins a critique to excessively reductionist evolutionary accounts of the development of human culture. It is difficult to frame human cultural behavior in a strictly Darwinian scheme.²⁵ I am basically inclined to disagree with evolutionary psychology, group selection theory, and with the old sociobiology as regards their ability to provide a full and stand-alone account of the development of culture, morals etc. Even if some insights of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology can be extremely fecund, I think that cultures do not evolve in a Darwinian way and that their *direct* Darwinian maladaptive character is difficult to see in the detailed and short-term case of culture.²⁶ Groups and individuals struggle against other groups and individuals, so to say egoistically. Both the cooperative and less cooperative ones are violent against the deviant inside the group and against other groups. Simply, cooperative individuals emphasize the overlapping between the moral visions (they for example can tend to reach a kind of “overlapping consensus”, in Rawls’ words (1987))²⁷ of how people feel/think/judge the world should be, while the others emphasize divisions.

Indeed, conflicts represent the main circumstance in which violence is “perceived as such”. I have to stress that moral and other conflicts are not necessarily negative and they do not necessarily lead to violent outcomes. Unfortunately, like (Wieviorka, 2009, p. 10) observes, not every conflict²⁸ is negotiable, and there is always the possibility of violence as a way of solving it. Of course the idea of

²⁵ On the contrary, Mesoudi, Whiten and Laland (2004) try to demonstrate that cultural evolution has key Darwinian properties: culture is shown to exhibit variation, competition, inheritance, and the accumulation of successive cultural modification over time. Adaptation, convergence, and a loss or change of function could also be identified in culture.

²⁶ Clearly, rejecting the hard-core of evolutionary psychology & co. does not force one to refuse an evolutionary account of morality *as a whole*: we can recuperate an evolutionary account of the role of culture if we consider the co-evolution of cognitive niches and ecological niches taken together, as I will describe in chapter four.

²⁷ On the applicability and limitations of Rawlsian approaches to resolve ethical issues cf. (Doom, 2009).

²⁸ A rich analysis of the problem of controlling violence in modern societies (especially in the case of school shooting, terrorism, state crisis) is contained in the recent collection (Heitmeyer et al., 2011).

violence as ineluctable and positive is very widespread among human beings, also in the case of intellectuals: Georges Sorel (1999) – I would say, following Dodd (2009, p. 4) “with his crypto-fascist celebration of violence as a foundation for the moral character of the working class – has already noted, and defended, the disruptive and regenerative role of violence, as Italian Futurism did at the beginning of twentieth century”. In this case violence “directly” and “intellectually” receives an attribution of moral worth.

It can be said that after the end of the total conflicts of the Cold War and workers’ movements/class struggle, that social conflicts have become “limited”, fragmented in a multitude of oppositions, and especially concentrated in individuals or small groups (*banlieue* young rioters, criminal gangs, terrorists, etc.). Furthermore, different sectors of an individual’s everyday life relate to (often) discrepant worlds of meaning and experience, and this fact is also, following Barnett and Littlejohn

[...] exacerbated by urbanization, or close contact among different people, and mass communication, or dissemination of confusingly diffuse realities. It is also exacerbated by political and territorial interests. [...] But we cannot have a community without a boundary to separate us from “outsiders”. Often, like in Yugoslavia, the line between the community and the outsiders is political and ethnic. Sometimes it is territorial or regional. Sometimes the boundary is religious sometimes it is racial and sometimes it is ideological. Sometimes it is economic, gender based, or generational. And much of the time, it is a combination of these (1997, p. 108).

As I will illustrate further on in section 4.5 of chapter four these variegated aspects give rise to the multiplicity of the so-called *collective axiologies*, as generators of limited conflicts typical of the post-Cold War and of the post-class struggle era. The concept provides a suitable tool to describe the problem of conflicts in general and of their violent or peaceful resolution. In summary, in the aforementioned contemporary conflicts negotiation is difficult – because of the lack of an appropriate institutional channeling of the disagreement – and violence considerably probable: “from completely institutionalized conflicts to completely unbridled violence” (p. 25).

1.2.4 Various Kinds of Violence

A recent very useful collection edited by Bufacchi (2009) provides the opportunity to draw up a list of issues trying to illustrate how violence is variegated and how it can be described in the light of multiple perspectives. The list is not systematic but I think it facilitates the reader in avoiding the acceptance of limited and narrow perspectives on violence (for example “violence is physical assault” or “violence is depriving a person of her just freedom”).

The modern state, as we know it, is founded on force (law), like Max Weber already clearly explained: furthermore, the state claims the monopoly of violence, and even if the exercise of violence is certainly an economic activity, violence is often wasteful.²⁹ Furthermore, violence is morally and/or legally and politically justified,

²⁹ (Dewey, 2009).

not only at the level of more or less legal institutions but also at the level of individuals (for example through law, revolutionary instances, terroristic “reasons”,³⁰ shared religious norms or more personal religious convictions, etc.). In the case of individual convictions which lead to violent acts, these are variable and often contradictory but always momentarily supposed to be (by the agent himself) “moral”. Moreover, the *progress* of civilization is not necessarily correlated with a diminution of all kinds of violence, like the twentieth century patently demonstrates (concentration camps, secret police, gas chambers, labor camps, liquidation of classes, races and whole populations, nuclear weapons, etc.) Violence in constitutional democracies tends to be highly regulated, and it appears justified or legitimated or simply impossible to avoid (Wolin, 2009); violence is physical and psychological and can take the form of positive and negative influences (for example, violence derives from social disorder, but also from a social order that causes a degree of poverty which in turn triggers further violence (Lee, 2009)).³¹

From another perspective, violence can be intended or unintended, manifest or latent (Audi, 2009; Garver, 2009) (or fruit of omissions – “negative actions” (Harris, 2009; Salmi, 2009)): especially, as I have already illustrated above, we have to distinguish between direct violence (where there is an actor that perpetrates violence) and structural violence (without any actor, but caused by institutions or economic systems (Harris, 2009), families (Galtung, 2009), which are more or less invisible examples of what I will call, later in this book, *violent mediators*). Finally, we have to reiterate that from the mere fact that something or someone is injured, destroyed or damaged (MacCallum, 2009), it does not follow that some violence was effectively committed: we always need to remember that violence is always labeled, contextual, and *perceived* as such.

1.3 Coalition Enforcement: Morality and Violence

1.3.1 *Abduction, Respecting People as Things, and Animals as Moral Mediators*

In this subsection I aim at introducing three key concepts that will be in the background of various argumentations contained in this book: 1) the importance of abduction, as a way of guessing hypotheses, in moral reasoning and in describing the role of fallacies in moral and violent settings; 2) the modernity – and urgency – of my moral motto “respecting people as things”, also for understanding subtle cases of violence; 3) the philosophical usefulness of framing the problem of violence in a biological and evolutionary³² perspective, where – so to say – the “animality of human animals” is a tool for avoiding traditional and robust philosophical illusions, prejudices, and ingenuities about violence.

³⁰ On the justification of violence in terrorism cf. (Nielsen, 2009).

³¹ Various kinds of violent conflicts, intrapersonal, sexual, at the origins of wars, in labor relations, in natural “cosmic violence”, are illustrated in (Jones and Fabian, 2005).

³² Not in the sense of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, though.

My study on hypothetical reasoning in terms of abductive cognition³³ has demonstrated that the human activity of guessing hypotheses – that is, abductive cognition – touches the important subject of morality and moral reasoning, and therefore violence. In the framework of “distributed morality”, a term coined in my recent book *Morality in a Technological World. Knowledge as Duty*,³⁴ I have illustrated the role of abduction in moral decision, both in deliberate and unconscious cases, and its relationship with hard-wired and trained emotions.³⁵ Moreover, the result that the abductive guessing of hypotheses is partly explicable as a more or less “logical” operation related to the “plastic” cognitive endowments of all organisms and partly as a biological phenomenon, eventually led me to the rediscovery of animals as “cognitive agents” but also as being endowed with moral intrinsic value.

I also repeatedly argued that people have to learn to be “respected as things”. Various kinds of “things” (for instance works of art and other cultural artifacts, institutions, symbols and of course animals) are now endowed with increasing intrinsic moral worth. When I say that people have to be respected as things I am referring to the fact that various “things” often have more intrinsic value than a human being³⁶ and so in these cases we can learn to re-attribute to humans the new moral value we have envisaged in those recently “dignified things”.

Let us consider the case of animals that can become what I call “moral mediators”. Darwin (1981) noted that studying cognitive capacities in non-human animals possesses an “independent interest, as an attempt to see how far the study of the lower animals throws light on one of the highest psychical faculties of man” – that is, the moral sense. Indeed, from this perspective, animals could play the role of moral mediators, because they mediate new aspects of human beings’ moral lives.³⁷

This line of thought traces back to Jeremy Bentham’s question “Can they [animals] suffer?” and to their violent scapegoating in sacrificial rituals – like in Abel’s sacrifice of an animal and Abraham’s sacrifice of a ram in place of his son, but we can also see some recently advanced philosophical speculations that link morality to the problem of the violent relationships between human and non-human animals. In *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, Derrida (2008) expresses his intense opposition to our current concept of the “Animal”:

Confined within this catch-all concept, within this vast encampment of the animal, in this general singular, within the strict enclosure of this definite article (“the Animal” and not “animals”), as in a virgin forest, a zoo, a hunting or fishing ground, a paddock

³³ (Magnani, 2009).

³⁴ (Magnani, 2007b).

³⁵ The problem of the role of emotions (and their relationships with reason) in moral decision from the point of view of neuroscience is treated in (Moll et al., 2007; Koenigs and Tranel, 2007; Moll and de Oliveira-Souza, 2008).

³⁶ This means, as an example, that one might be more willing to hurt and/or destroy a human being than one of those other entities: the killing of a whale or the destruction of an ancient statue are perceived as much more violent (and hence they give rise to greater scandal) than the homicide of a man.

³⁷ I have treated the problem of moral mediators in (Magnani, 2007b), see also chapter four, section 4.4, this book.

or an abattoir, a space of domestication, are all the living things that man does not recognize as his fellows, his neighbors, or his brothers. And that is so in spite of the infinite space that separates the lizard from the dog, the protozoon from the dolphin, the shark from the lamb, the parrot from the chimpanzee, the camel from the eagle, the squirrel from the tiger, the elephant from the cat, the ant from the silkworm, or the hedgehog from the echidna (p. 34).

Human language tends to seize the animal *in general*: any animal, an arbitrary animal that, as it cannot speak, has its identity denied. Following his own tenet about the violent role played by language Derrida continues unveiling the crime silently perpetrated against animals:

No, no, my cat, the cat that looks at me in my bedroom or bathroom, this cat that is perhaps not "my cat" or "my pussycat", does not appear here to represent, like an ambassador, the immense symbolic responsibility with which our culture has always charged the feline race, from La Fontaine to Tieck [...] from Baudelaire to Rilke, and many others. If I say "it is a real cat" that sees me naked, this is in order to mark its insubstitutable singularity. [...] The confusion of all non human living things within the general and common category of the animal is not simply a sin against rigorous thinking, vigilance, lucidity, or empirical authority, it is also a crime (pp. 9 and 48).

Those reflections should bring us back the main problem of this book, the intertwining between morality and violence which is object of the following subsections. To frame the problem in an evolutionary and diachronic perspective is an initial useful step to insert it correctly in our philosophical scene. Studying the naturalistic basis of morality is clearly of great importance in increasing knowledge on morality in the direction already masterfully envisaged by Darwin.³⁸

Greene (2003) usefully reminds us that – even if in Western culture many moral philosophers have regarded scientific research as irrelevant to their work because science deals with what is the case, whereas ethics deals with what ought to be – it is important to take advantage of those approaches that question the is/ought dichotomy, arguing that science and normative ethics are actually continuous. I have illustrated myself³⁹ how Searle is correct in considering "bizarre" that feature of our intellectual tradition, according to which true statements – so to say, fruit of "sound" inferences – that describe how things are in the world can never imply a statement about how they ought to be:⁴⁰ Searle contends that to say something is true is already to say you ought to believe it, that is *other things being equal*, you ought not to deny it. This means that normativity is more widespread than expected.

Besides, the problem of the abductive construction of extended cognitive niches offers a chance to see the role of human cognition in the management and correction of maladaptive artifactual niches, which immediately relates to the relationship

³⁸ The possible biological roots of morality, and so of punishment and *moral-based* violence, is discussed in depth in (Broom, 2009) (which also considers the moral role of religion), in (Waal et al., 2006) and, more recently in (Bekoff and Pierce, 2009): these books address the problem of individuating and describing the moral behavior of many animals.

³⁹ (Magnani, 2007b, chapter seven).

⁴⁰ I will return on this problem in chapter three, section 3.2.

between morality and knowledge in our technological world and to the role of the creative hypothetical reasoning employed in such a task. Furthermore, the analysis of the interplay between fallacies and abductive guessing I will present in chapter three will also illustrate how: 1) abduction and other kinds of hypothetical reasoning are involved in dialectic processes, which are at play in both everyday agent-based settings and rather scientific ones; 2) they are strictly linked to so-called smart heuristics and to the fact that very often less information gives rise to better performance; 3) heuristics linked to hypothetical reasoning like “following the crowd”, or social imitation, are differently linked to fallacious aspects – which involve abductive steps – and they are often very effective. I will especially stress that these and other fallacies, are linked to what René Thom calls “military intelligence”, which relates to the problem of the role of language in the so-called *coalition enforcement*, that is in the affirmation of morality and the related perpetration of violent punishment. It is in this sense that I will point out the importance of fallacies as “distributed military intelligence”.

Indeed the aim of the following subsections is to clarify the idea of “coalition enforcement”. This idea illustrates a whole theoretical background for interpreting the topics above concerning morality, violence, and hypothetical reasoning as well as my own position, which resorts to the hypothesis about the existence of a strict multifaceted link between morality and violence. The theme is further linked to some of the issues I will illustrate in the following chapter, where I make profitable use of Thom’s attention to the moral/violent role of what he calls “proto-moral conflicts”: I will fully stress that, for example, the fundamental function of language can only be completely understood in the light of its intrinsic *moral* (and at the same time *violent*) purpose, which is basically rooted in an activity of *military intelligence*.

1.3.2 *Coalition Enforcement Hypothesis*

The coalition enforcement hypothesis, put forward by Bingham (1999; 2000), aims at providing an explanation of the “human uniqueness” that is at the origin of human communication and language, in a strict relationship with the spectacular ecological dominance achieved by *H. Sapiens*, and of the role of cultural heritage. From this perspective, and due to the related constant moral and policing dimension of *Homo*’s coalition enforcement history (which has an approximately two-million-year evolutionary history), human beings can be fundamentally seen as *self-domesticated animals*. I think the main speculative value of this hypothesis consists in stressing the role of the more or less stable stages of cooperation *through morality* (and through the related unavoidable violence). Taking advantage of a probabilistic modeling of how individual learning – coupled with cultural transmission and a tendency to conform to the behavior of others – can lead to adaptive norms, Boyd and Richerson (2001) contend that it is possible for norms to guide people toward sensible behaviors that they would not choose if left to their own devices.

The hypothesis implicitly shows how both *morality* and *violence* are strictly intertwined in their social and institutional aspects,⁴¹ which are implicit in the activity of cognitive niche construction. In an evolutionary dimension, coalition enforcement is enacted through the construction of social *cognitive niches* as a new way of diverse human adaptation. Basically the hypothesis refers to cooperation between related and unrelated animals to produce significant mutual benefits that exceed costs and are potentially adaptive for the cooperators.⁴² Wilson, Timmel, and Miller (2004) aim at demonstrating the possibility that groups engage in coordinated and cooperative cognitive processes, thus exceeding by far the possibilities of individual thinking, by recurring to a hypothesized "group mind" whose role would be fundamental in social cognition and group adaptation. The formation of appropriate groups which behave according to explicit and implicit more or less flexible rules of various types (also moral rules, of course) can be reinterpreted – beyond Wilson's strict and puzzling "direct" Darwinian version – as the "social" constitution of a "cognitive niche",⁴³ that is a cognitive modification of the environment which confronts the coevolutionary problem of varying selective pressures in an adaptive or maladaptive way.⁴⁴

In hominids, cooperation in groups (which, contrary to the case of non-human animals, is largely independent from kinship) fundamentally derived from the need to detect, control, and punish social parasites, who for example did not share the meat they hunted or partook of the food without joining the hunting party⁴⁵ (also variously referred to as free riders, defectors, and cheaters). These social parasites were variously dealt with by killing or injuring them (and also by killing cooperators who refused to punish them) *from a distance* using projectile and clubbing weapons. In this case injuring and killing are cooperative and remote (and at the same time they are "cognitive" activities). According to the coalition enforcement hypothesis, the avoidance of proximal conflict reduces risks for the individuals (hence the importance of *remote killing*). Of course, cooperative morality that generates "violence" against unusually "violent" and aggressive free riders and parasites can be performed in other weaker ways, such as denying a future access to the resource, injuring a juvenile

⁴¹ North, Wallis and Weingast (2009) integrate the problem of violence into a larger framework that includes social sciences and history, showing how economic and political behavior in modern states are closely linked. "Natural states" introduce a political manipulation of the economy that allows the creation of privileged interests limiting the use of violence by a tit-for-tat mechanism, insofar as powerful, privileged individuals think it is safer not to threaten each other's privileges. Such a practice establishes a compromising trade-off between safety and moderate economic and political development. Modern societies generate and rely on open access to economic and political organizations, favoring political and economic growth through competition.

⁴² On human and animal various types of altruism and on human cooperation through social institutions see (Tommasello, 2009).

⁴³ Cf. chapter four, this book.

⁴⁴ On the coevolution of intelligence, sociality, and language in the perspective of cognitive niches see (Pinker, 2010).

⁴⁵ (Boehm, 1999).

relative, gossiping to persecute dishonest communication and manipulative in-group behaviors or waging war against less cooperative groups, etc.⁴⁶

In such a way group cooperation (for example for efficient collective hunting and meat sharing through control of free riders) has been able to evolve adaptively and to render parasitic strategies no longer systematically adaptive. Through cooperation and remote killing, individual costs of punishing are greatly reduced and so are individual aggressiveness and violence, perhaps because violence is morally “distributed” in a more sustainable way: “Consistent with this view, contemporary humans are unique among top predators in being relatively placid in dealing with unrelated conspecific nonmates under a wide variety of circumstances” (Bingham, 1999, p. 140). [I have to note, “contrarily to the common sense conviction”, due to the huge amount of violence human beings are still faced with everyday!] Hence, it has to be said that humans, contrarily to non-human animals, exchange a fundamental and considerable amount of relatively reliable information with unrelated conspecifics (p. 144).

Here the role of docility is worth citing (which relates to the already recognized distressing human tendency to conform, displace responsibility, comply, and submit to the authority of dominant individuals, emphasized by social psychology (Dellarosa Cummins, 2000, p. 11)). According to Herbert Simon (1993, p. 156), humans are docile in the sense that their fitness is enhanced by “[...] the tendency to depend on suggestions, recommendations, persuasion, and information obtained through social channels as a major basis for choice”. In other words, humans support their limited decision-making capabilities, relying on external data obtained through their senses from their social environment. The social context gives them the main data filter, available to increase individual fitness. Therefore, docility is a kind of attitude or disposition underlying those activities of cognitive niche construction, which are related to the delegation and exploitation of ecological resources. That is, docility is an adaptive response to (or a consequence of) the increasing cognitive demand (or selective pressure) on those information-gaining ontogenetic processes, resulting from an intensive activity of niche construction. In other words, docility permits the inheritance of a large amount of useful knowledge while lessening the costs related to (individual) learning.

In Simon’s work, docility is related to the idea of *socializability*, and to altruism in the sense that one cannot be altruistic if he or she is not docile. In this perspective, however, the most important concept is docility and not altruism, because docility is the cognitive condition of the possibility of the emergence of altruism. I believe, at least in the light of the coalition enforcement hypothesis, that moral altruism can be correctly seen as a sub-product of – or at least intertwined with – the violent behavior needed to “morally” defend and enforce coalitions. I have said that groups need to detect, control and punish social parasites, that for example do not share meat (food as nutrient as hard to acquire), by killing or injuring them (and any cooperators who refuse to carry out punishment) and to this aim they have to gain the cooperation of other potential punishers.

⁴⁶ On the moral/violent nature of gossip and fallacies cf. (Bardone and Magnani, 2010).

Research on chimps’ behavior shows that punishment can be seen as altruistic for the benefit of the other members of the group (and to the aim of changing the future actions of the individual being punished), often together with “the function of keeping the top ranking male, or coalition of males, at top, or preserving the troop-level macrocoalition that disproportionately serves the interests of those on top” (Rohwer, 2007, p. 805). The last observation also explains how altruistic punishment can serve individual purposes (and so it can be captured by individual selection models): in chimps it reflects the desire to maintain status, that is a new high position in the hierarchy. Rohwer’s conclusion is that “certain behaviors that can be covered by the definition of altruistic punishment need not have arisen from group selection pressures [...] as the Sober and Wilson model assumes. Seen through the lens of the linear dominance hierarchy, it is reasonable to suspect that altruistic punishment may have originated primarily through individual selection pressures” (p. 803 and p. 810).⁴⁷

I have said above that groups need to detect and punish social parasites by killing or injuring them (and any cooperators who refuse to carry out punishment) and to this aim they have to gain the cooperation of other potential punishers. This explains altruistic behavior (and the related cognitive endowments which make it possible, such as affectivity, empathy and other non violent aspects of *moral* inclinations) which can be used in order to reach cooperation. To control free-riders inside the group and guard against threat from other alien groups, human coalitions – as the most gregarious animal groups – have to take care of the individuals who cooperate. It is from this perspective that we can explain, as I have said above, quoting Bingham, why contemporary humans are not only violent but *also* very docile and “[...] unique among top predators in being relatively placid”. Moreover, Lahti and Weinstein (2005) further emphasize the evolutionary adaptive role of morality (and so of cooperation) as “group stability insurance”: the exigence of morality as group stability would explain the “viscosity” of basic aspects of the morality of a group and why morality is perceived as having an air of absolutism. I also add that this viscosity favors the “embubblement” I will illustrate in chapter three, subsection 3.2.2, which explains the obliteration – at the level of the agent awareness – of the actual violent outcomes of his moral actions.⁴⁸

The problem of docility is twofold. First, people delegate tasks of data acquisition to their experience, to external cultural resources and to other individuals. Second, people generally put their trust in one another in order to learn. A big cerebral cortex, speech, rudimentary social settings and primitive material culture furnished the conditions for the birth of the mind as a “universal machine” – to use Turing’s

⁴⁷ On the puzzling problem of the distinction between individual and group selection for altruism in the framework of multilevel selection cf. (Rosas, 2008): multilevel selection theory claims that selection operates simultaneously on genes, organisms, and groups of organisms. A history of the debate about altruism is given by (Dugatkin, 2008).

⁴⁸ On the intrinsic moral character of human communities – with behavioral prescriptions, social monitoring, and punishment of deviance – for much of their evolutionary history cf. (Wilson, 2002a, p. 62) and (Boehm, 1999).

expression. I contend that a big cortex can provide an evolutionary advantage only in the presence of a massive storage of meaningful information and knowledge on external supports that only a developed (even if small) community of human beings can possess. If we consider high-level consciousness as related to a high-level organization of the human cortex, its origins can be related to the active role of environmental, social, linguistic, and cultural aspects. It is in this sense that docile interaction lies at the root of our social (and neurological) development. It is obvious that docility is related to the development of cultures, morality, actual cultural availability and to the quality of cross-cultural relationships. Of course, the type of cultural dissemination and possible cultural enhancements affect the chances that human collectives have to take advantage of docility and thus to potentially increase or decrease their fitness.

As I have already noted, the direct consequence of coalition enforcement is the development and the central role of cultural heritage (morality and sense of guilt included): in other words, I am hinting at the importance of cultural *cognitive niches* as new ways of arriving at diverse human adaptations. From this perspective the long-lived and yet abstract human sense of guilt represents a psychological adaptation, *abductively* anticipating an appraisal of a moral situation to avoid becoming a target of violent coalitional enforcement. Again, we have to recall that Darwinian processes are involved not only in the genetic domain but also (with a looser and lesser precision) in the additional cultural domain, through the selective pressure activated by modifications in the environment brought about by cognitive niche construction. According to the theory of cognitive niches, coercive human coalition as a fundamental cognitive niche constructed by humans becomes itself a major element of the selective environment and thus imposes new constraints (designed by *extragenetic information* on its members).⁴⁹

Some empirical evidence (presented by Bingham (2000)) seems to support the coalition enforcement hypothesis: fossils of *Homo* (but not of Australopithecines) show, on observation of skeletal adaptations, how selection developed an astonishing competence in humans relating to the controlled and violent use of projectile and clubbing weapons (bipedal locomotion, the development of *gluteus maximus* muscle and its capacity to produce rotational acceleration, etc.). The observed parallel increase in cranial volume can be related to the increased social cooperation based on the reception, use and transmission of “extragenetic information”. Moreover, physiological, evolutionary, and obstetric constraints on brain size and structure indicate that humans can individually acquire a limited amount of extragenetical information, that consequently has to be massively stored and kept available in the external environment.

Usually it is said that Darwinian processes operating on genetic information produce human minds whose properties somehow include generation of the novel, complex adaptive design reflected in human material artifacts *sui generis*. However, these explanations

⁴⁹ On the concept of extragenetic information cf. chapter six of (Magnani, 2009), and chapter five, section 5.2.3, this book.

[...] fail to explain human uniqueness. If building such minds by the action of Darwinian selection on genetic information were somehow possible, this adaptation would presumably be recurrent. Instead, it is unique to humans. Before turning to a possible resolution of this confusion, two additional properties of human technological innovation must be recalled. First, its scale has recently become massive with the emergence of behaviorally modern humans about 40,000 years ago. Second, the speed of modern human innovation is unprecedented and sometimes appears to exceed rates achievable by the action of Darwinian selection on genetic information (Bingham, 1999, p. 145).

Hence, a fundamental role in the evolution of “non” genetic information has to be hypothesized. Appropriately, coalition enforcement implies the emergence of novel extra-genetic information, such as large scale mutual information exchange – including both linguistic and model-based⁵⁰ communication between unrelated kin. As mentioned above, it is noteworthy that extra-genetic information plays a fundamental role in terms of transmitted ideas (cultural/moral aspects), behavior, and other resources embedded in artifacts (ecological inheritance). It is easy to acknowledge that this information can be stored in human memory – in various ways, both at the level of long-lived neural structures that influence behavior, and at the level of external devices (cognitive niches), which are transmitted indefinitely and are thus potentially immortal – but also independently of small kinship groups. Moreover, transmission and selection of extragenetic information is at least partially independent of an organism’s biological reproduction.

1.3.3 The Origin of Moral/Social Norms, Social Dominance Hierarchies and Violence

It is important to show how moral norms, cooperation, and social dominance hierarchies can be accounted for from an evolutionary point of view. A great deal of important research has been done recently in this field.

The evolutionary account of social norms in terms of cognitive niches allow us to try to overcome the still puzzling question of their genetic or extra-genetic origin: some of them may not be learned behaviors at all (e.g, incest avoidance), but a vast area of social patterns of behavior seem self-evidently learned. Bandura (1977) basically sees them as the result of social learning. O’Gorman, Wilson and Miller (2008) report that some researchers seem to contend that social norms are not due solely to incidental group boundaries or selfish herds, but to an ancient phylogenetic history, given the fact that some animal species demonstrate a kind of conforming behavior (following the herd), to avoid exposure to predators; others suggest that they may result from an evolved strategy to avoid the costs of individual learning

⁵⁰ Examples of model-based cognition are constructing and manipulating visual representations, thought experiment, analogical reasoning, etc. but it also refers to the cognition animals can get through emotions and other feelings. Charles Sanders Peirce already acknowledged the fact that all inference is a form of sign activity, where the word sign includes various model-based ways of cognition: “feeling, image, conception, and other representation” (CP, 5.283).

and/or to react to a fluctuating environment; others that norms are related to the fact that certain behaviors may achieve some form of symbolic status for a group,⁵¹ in such a way that the very *achievement* of learning the behavior is important to be considered part of the group.

The perspective that is closer to the coalition enforcement hypothesis is the one that sees norms as the product of cooperative group behavior, where some norms can be elevated to moral norms or rules,⁵² or to between-group selection regulators.⁵³ It is worth noting that punishment of norm violators⁵⁴ is seen as a near-universal trait of humans,⁵⁵ through gossip, exclusion and expulsion from groups, or murder. O’Gorman, Wilson, and Miller note that a great part of this research leads to the prediction that there is a conformity bias in human cognition “facilitating enhanced recall of normative information”.⁵⁶ These authors have also provided empirical evidence that human beings have superior recall for normative/social information than for non-normative information, also providing a limited cross-cultural endorsement of the hypothesis, and favoring the conviction about their likely hardwiring in the human brain and a consequent possible explanation in evolutionary terms.

Recent research acknowledges the role of social dominance hierarchies in cooperative activities of human and non-human animals (like social mammals), also stressing the deontic importance of moral behavior and intertwined violent components. Evidence from comparative, developmental, and cognitive psychological research show how they shaped the evolution of the human mind and so of human social institutions. Pressures that derive from living in hierarchical groups shaped basic concept and cognitive devices (which are not interpreted as innate modules but instead as favored by a kind of “biological preparedness”, a propensity to develop them in a combination of genetical and environmental circumstances). These concepts and cognitive devices are in turn related to the various stages of development of cognitive niches, crucial factors to survive in those hierarchic settings. They are: 1) recognizing and reasoning transitively about dominance relations (making rank and kinship discriminations), 2) fast-track learning of social norms (permissions, prohibitions, and obligations), 3) detecting violations of social norms and codes – also called *deontic effect* – (cheating and deceptions to flout social norms and to have better access to reproductive opportunities through monitoring reciprocal obligations based on resource sharing) 4) reading intentions of others and so predicting their behavior, especially – again – to favor detection of violations (but also to allow compassion and social codes based on something other than social norms).⁵⁷

⁵¹ (Dessalles, 2000).

⁵² (Boehm, 1999).

⁵³ (Wilson and Kniffin, 1999).

⁵⁴ Zaibert (2006) illustrates that current state legal punishment is tied to the moral practice of blaming, and that the very practice of placing the blame is what presumptively provides many of the intuitions that we have as regards punishment.

⁵⁵ (Brown, 1991).

⁵⁶ (O’Gorman et al., 2008, p. 72).

⁵⁷ (Dellarosa Cummins, 2000).

We have to add that perceived violations were already studied as the most common cause of aggression in primate groups:⁵⁸ without a capacity for violation detection high-ranking individuals cannot monopolize resources and maintain fruitful alliances, and preserve the peace. Especially in human collectives, violation detection is the most precious tool for ensuring that social norms (implicit and explicit) are honored thus facilitating social regulation, and to promote the emergence of altruism as a stable strategy.

It is easy to derive from this picture that transgressions are often seen as *moral* transgressions by the detectors but not necessarily by the transgressors. In modern humans violence activated by the detectors to control transgression is seen by them as *morally* justified but it is often seen as a mere violence by the transgressors. Is this not what happens in our current society when a murderer thinks he "did the right thing", for example to retaliate, contrarily to "other" human beings that instead think it is moral to execute him in the legal form of capital punishment? The former indeed thinks he has performed a "moral" murder: revenge is part and parcel of various kinds of human moral behaviors seen in the light of social, historical, and anthropological perspectives, but the wrong he wanted to revenge was not thought so by the rest of the coalition.

Dellarosa Cummins is implicitly aware that social dominance hierarchies are benign but also potentially negative, and the following consideration in some sense mirrors, from the point of view of a cognitive evolutionary psychology, my philosophical contention about the strict relationship between morality and violence:

In their most benign form, hierarchies reflect nothing more than leadership qualities among a few individuals. In their more malevolent form, such hierarchies can constitute rigid and profound socioeconomic stratification. From a socio-political perspective, perhaps the most important contribution that cognitive psychologists can make is to investigate which environmental contingencies trigger or hinder the expression of these potentially destructive biological predispositions (2000, p. 22).

Other aspects of the importance of cooperation (and so of punishment and violence) are also analyzed in the field of evolutionary and cognitive studies. The cognitive importance of the internalization of phonemes for cooperation has been recently stressed by cognitive paleoanthropological research.⁵⁹ The so called "enhanced working memory" (EWM) (and its executive functions) can be plausibly traced back about 30.000 years in hominids: the authors show that it seemed to coevolve with the birth of a *phonological storage capacity* along with consequent language and other modern reasoning abilities such as planning, problem solving/algorithm manipulation, analogy, modeling, holding inner representations, tool-use, and tool-making. In particular, an increase in phonological storage could also have aided cross-modal thinking (and so abductive hypothetical cognition) and the social tasks required by the need for coalition enforcement: "[...] enhanced phonological storage may have freed language from the laconic and its confinement to present tense and simple imperatives to rapidly-spoken speech and the use of

⁵⁸ (Hall, 1964).

⁵⁹ (Coolidge and Wynn, 2005).

future tense – the linking of past, present, and future, and the use of the subjunctive [...]. Although real enemy's actions might be anticipated, imaginary enemies could be envisioned and other intangible terrors could be given life. Great anxieties could arise with novel vistas (e.g. the meaning of life, thoughts of death, life after death, etc.)” (p. 22). Consequently more room for morality, punishment, and subsequent more sophisticated chances and methods for perpetrating violence would be opened up!

Finally, Castro and Toro (2004) contend that the birth of moral judgements also coevolves with the cultural transmission itself, as a whole cumulative inheritance system. Following the model of the dual inheritance theory and gene-culture coevolution, they suggest that there seems to be an increase, either qualitative or quantitative, in the efficiency of imitation as the fundamental factor able to explain the transformation of primate social learning in a cumulative cultural system of inheritance as happens during *hominization*. The authors contend that more efficient imitation is necessary but not enough for this transformation to occur and that the key factor enabling such a transformation is that some hominids developed the deontic capacity to approve or disapprove of their offspring's learned behavior.⁶⁰ Such a capacity to approve or disapprove of one's offspring's behavior makes learning both less costly and more accurate, and it transformed the hominid culture into a system of cumulative cultural inheritance similar to that of humans, although the system would still partake of a prelinguistic nature. In this perspective, axiological and moral aspects result completely intertwined with the evolution of culture as a whole.

1.3.4 Cooperation, Altruism, and Punishment: An Epistemological Note

West, Griffin and Gardner (2008, p. 415) correctly say that, from an evolutionary perspective, social behaviors – and hence *moral* ones – are those affecting the fitness of the individual that enacts that particular behavior and of other individuals as well, as a consequence. They also usefully note that, over at least four decades, an enormous amount of theoretical and empirical literature has developed on this topic, as demonstrated by the illustration I have given in the previous two subsections, but “the progress is often hindered by poor communication between scientists, with different people using the same term to mean different things, or different terms to mean the same thing. This can obscure what is biologically important, and what is not”. The clear discussion is related to the semantic confusion about concepts such as altruism and weak altruism, cooperation, mutualism, punishment, reciprocity and strong reciprocity, and group selection. In the end they emphasize – and I strongly

⁶⁰ In (Castro et al., 2010) the authors add that the social approval/disapproval of behavior is also adaptive because it tends to homogenize behaviors, beliefs and values of the groups whose members interact in a cooperative and docile way – for mutual benefit. It is assumed that an essential aspect of man is his condition as *Homo suadens*: if a behavior is approved of then it is a good behavior.

agree with them – it is at least necessary to distinguish between *proximate* (mechanism) and *ultimate* (survival value) explanations of behavior. Even if I think the described confusion is truly spectacular, I am sure it does not affect my philosophical concern, which addresses general issues related to the intertwining between morality and violence. I think my analysis of this intertwining is just fecundated by this interdisciplinary and often embarrassing epistemological situation, because philosophy, which does have neither direct scientific aims nor too many epistemological worries, can focus on some general aspects that can be extracted and shared – and thus further critically enlightened – by almost any of the aforementioned approaches.⁶¹

Finally, recent research aims at increasing cognitive knowledge on the relationship between cooperation and punishment taking advantage of an abstract Bayesian modeling of a population of learning agents, studying the effect of innate behavioral dispositions (such as *prosociality*) combined with the effect of learning (as a response to contingent punishment).⁶² A relationship which in a sense partially reverberates my theme concerning the link between morality and punishment. The research stresses the fact that the coevolution of punishment and prosociality depends critically upon the "manner" in which perpetrators learn from punishment: for example the capacity to learn from punishment can allow both punishment and prosocial behavior to evolve by natural selection. The modeling indicates interesting levels of evolutionary selective optimality in the balance between innate prosociality and learning. Costly punishment of antisocial behavior would be adaptively favored when it causes others to act prosocially in future interactions, that is when agents can learn to avoid punishment. The authors themselves point out the limit of this kind of modeling, which relates to its abstractness and to the fact that it is unlikely to represent prosociality as just linked to a mere expectation of contingent reward or punishment, while it is clear that prosocial behavior also has an intrinsic utility.

Rosas (2009, p. 555), still in an evolutionary perspective, further studies the relationship between reciprocity (cooperation) and punishment and concludes that hierarchy among them cannot be established. Indeed, we find out that reciprocity is the core of behaviors driven by *norms* prescribing either *goodness* or *badness*: "The mechanism for reciprocity in humans emerges as a meta-norm that governs both retaliation and punishment", whereas punishment appears basically aimed at inculcating norms. Reciprocity frames cooperators as those who pursue a higher-level form of "moral" punishment, unselfish and emotionally driven, which does not merely look primarily at the balance between costs and benefits for the perpetrators.

Finally, the possible coevolution between the so-called "moral signals" and indirect reciprocity is analyzed by Smead (2010). The author finds that it is possible for moral signals – as an unlikely accident of the evolutionary process' starting point – to evolve alongside indirect reciprocity but, in the absence of some external *exogenous* pressure aiding the evolution of a signaling system, such a coevolution is

⁶¹ For an illustration of the puzzling theoretical problems related to evolution, cooperation, altruism, and punishment, in the case of a study on scientific, philosophical, and theological reflections on the origin of religion, cf. (Schloss and Murray, 2009).

⁶² (Cushman and Macindoe, 2010).

unlikely: “Thus, for the use of ‘moral signals’ to evolve in this setting, it is important that signals be subject to selective pressure apart from indirect reciprocity. Furthermore, when such exogenous pressures are included, interesting possibilities arise. Different populations can evolve different ‘moral systems’ that vary in the way they use moral signals’. These simple models show that even if moral language plays a crucial role in cooperation through indirect reciprocity, it does not follow that this setting has provided the selective pressure driving the evolution of a moral language” (p. 50).

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Understanding Violence

The Intertwining of Morality, Religion and
Violence: A Philosophical Stance



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