
is “underpinned by common standards, deposit insurance, bankruptcy rules, court-enforced contracts, a lender-of-last-resort, a fiscal backstop, and an alphabet soup of regulatory and supervisory agencies” (p. 113). In effect, hedgehogs are highballers who never look back in the rear view mirror of their jets and yachts because they are racing forward at lightning speed, flying too far above the clouds, or they just don’t care about the aftermath of destruction that trails in their wake.

I recommend reading this book as it is informative, entertaining, and enlightening. It has its shortcomings but ultimately it captures the heart of global economics today, and it often does so in a refreshing and humorous way. Rodrik steps outside the box to critique not only globalization, but also the future of democracy and the economists who play a central role in determining the narrative that will be followed in the future. He reasons that we can’t compromise on democracy, and argues that state democracy remains a pillar of economic growth.

Violence: Capitalism, Language and Physical Force

Violence. Six Sideways Reflections by Slavoj Žižek. Profile Books, 2009, pp. 218, ISBN 978-1-84668-027-4, £8.99 (pbk.)

By Charles Barthold

Slavoj Žižek is omnipresent within Anglophone academe, even though he lives and works in Slovenia. He is one of the most influential of radical contemporary philosophers along with other figures such as Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou, Jacques Rancière and Toni Negri. Žižek overtly defends communist ideas, as the conference which he organised with Costas Douzinas on ‘the idea of communism’ in 2010 clearly displayed.

His two main intellectual sources of inspiration are Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis, even though he draws on a considerable philosophical repertoire, including German idealism, (in particular Hegel), phenomenology (Heidegger, Husserl) and contemporary philosophy (Postmodernism, Sloterdijk, New Philosophers). Žižek is mostly very critical of the approaches of Postmodernist philosophy, as they would be fascinated by the dynamic of late capitalism. However, Žižek does not only produce psychoanalytical or philosophical commentaries, as he also analyses film, series and popular culture generally speaking. In other words, Žižek mingles ‘serious’ references

with 'low brow' ones in order to provide a critical analysis on contemporary societies and late capitalism.

Turning to *Violence*, in the introduction the author constructs his intervention as a conceptual one, which should avoid an exaggerated empathy with victims:

My underlying premise is there is something inherently mystifying in a direct confrontation with it: the overpowering horror of violent acts and empathy with the victims inexorably function as a lure, which prevents us from thinking. A dispassionate conceptual development of the typology of violence must by definition ignore its traumatic impact. (p. 3)

Therefore, Žižek makes clear that he wants to understand violence as a phenomenon rather than drawing a purely moral condemnation of it. Actually, the victims of violence – in particular extreme cases violence such as the Holocaust – would not be able to analyse the phenomenon, precisely because they were traumatically involved in it (p. 4). Žižek refuses the argument of the urgency of violence, which would demand intellectuals to act and not to think. Accordingly, it is always necessary to think and understand prior to displaying an agency. Therefore, Žižek mentions the example of Lenin, who was studying Hegel's *Logic* during the First World War (p. 10).

In the first chapter ('SOS Violence'), Žižek distinguishes several types of violence. The first one is violence that is produced systematically ("We're talking here of the violence inherent in a system: not only direct physical violence, but also the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation, including the threat of violence" (p. 8)). This consists in the violence needed in order to reproduce the status quo and its social structures. Capitalism represents one of the most important forms of systemic violence within contemporary societies (p. 11). Žižek draws an analogy between capitalist systemic violence ('theological mad dance of commodities') and the Lacanian Real (p. 11). Secondly, Žižek defines as 'subjective violence' the most commonsensical forms of violence produced by identified subjects, that is to say visible violence such as insults, killings (p. 9). Additionally, according to Žižek, there exists a 'symbolic violence' of language based on the master signifier (p. 1).

In a later chapter ('Antinomies of Tolerant Reason') Žižek confronts the issue of multiculturalism. Accordingly, there would be an antinomy of the 'tolerant reason' displayed by the debates on the caricatures of Muhammad (p. 89). This means, the arguments of both camps are valid: free speech against the respect of a particular culture. In fact, the multiculturalist ideology would hide a 'covert racism' (p. 97). Accordingly, the only way to treat Muslims as 'serious adults responsible for their beliefs' would be to criticise their religion (p. 118).

Notable also is Žižek's discussion of Sloterdijk's condemnation of revolutionary violence. From the point of view of Sloterdijk, the latter constitutes a kind

of resentment against the organisation of society (p. 160). Against this, Žižek provides a defense of the notion of resentment, which constitutes “a refusal to ‘normalise’ the crime, to make it part of the ordinary/explicable/accountable flow of things” (p. 161). This reasoning allows Žižek to advocate the notion of emancipatory violence producing a kind of political ‘miracle’ (p. 169).

All in all, *Violence* does not constitute a systematic philosophical treatise on the question of violence. It is characterised rather by a series of reflections, which are not necessarily linked. Therefore, generally speaking some points seem more convincing or developed than others. Moreover, Žižek never thoroughly justifies his fundamental theoretical approaches, namely Marxism and Lacanism. For instance, one could criticise the Structuralist position of the Lacanian triad (Imaginary-Symbolic-Real) from a Poststructuralist perspective or one could dismiss psychoanalysis from a Deleuzian standpoint. Nonetheless, Žižek’s project consists in analysing violence from a Marxist and Lacanian perspective and not to defend Marxism and Lacanism against its critics.

Žižek describes three types of violence, namely symbolic, systemic and subjective. However, there is never a clear definition of what violence is. Indeed, it is quite difficult to use the same concept to talk about the master signifier and the fact a language imposes its order on the world (symbolic violence), the coercion entailed by the reproduction of social relations (systemic violence) and straightforward physical violence (subjective violence). After all, the only violence which we can experience is the subjective violence exercised on bodies, as would claim a phenomenological approach.

Furthermore, the systemic violence enhances the subjective violence, as for instance the capitalist fetishism of the commodity crystallises a relation of domination and violence between classes, which is materialised on the body of the workers. Then, strictly speaking the systemic violence is not a violence but the condition of possibility of the reproduction of violence within a certain social context. Similarly, the symbolic violence could be deemed as a condition to implement violent relations on dominated bodies. For instance, a phallogocentric language would be the condition for a violence exercised on the gendered bodies of women, or a coloniser’s language would be the condition for a violence exercised on the bodies of subalterns.

Nonetheless, the interest of Žižek’s reasoning lies in the fact that he demonstrates the link between the dynamic of capitalism, language and the physical violence exercised on bodies. Against Postmodern liberals, he politicises the question of culture and endorses the potential for a revolutionary or progressive violence. In other words, Žižek brings an interesting complexity to the question of violence, going beyond the commonsensical moralistic rejection of it.