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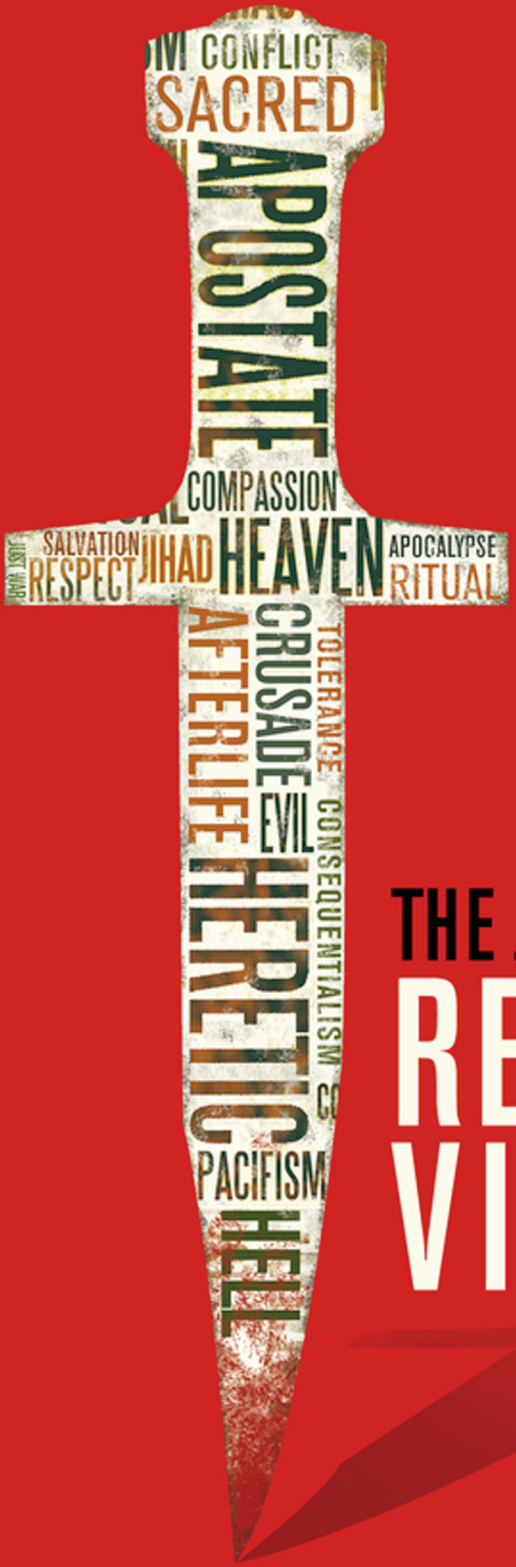

THE JUSTIFICATION OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

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The Justification of Religious Violence

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Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it for religious conviction.
Blaise Pascal

To oppose the torrent of scholastic religion by such feeble maxims as these, that it is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be, that the whole is greater than a part, that two and three make five; is pretending to stop the ocean with a bullrush. Will you set up profane reason against sacred mystery? No punishment is great enough for your impiety. And the same fires, which were kindled for heretics, will serve also for the destruction of philosophers.
David Hume

Will you love that man or woman well enough to shed their blood?
Brigham Young

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Preface

Much has been written about the relationship between religion and violence, and much of what has been written is aimed at determining whether, how, and why religion causes violence. This book has a different goal. Followers of many different religions who commit violent acts seek to justify these by appealing to religion. I aim to understand how such justifications proceed; and how they do, or do not, differ from ordinary secular justifications for violence. I will show that religious justifications for violence generally exemplify the same logical forms as ordinary secular justifications for violence. I will also show that many religiously based justifications for violence are as acceptable as rigorous secular justifications for violence, provided that crucial premises, which religion supplies, are accepted. Religious believers are able to incorporate premises, grounded in the metaphysics of religious worldviews, in arguments for the conclusion that this or that violent act is justified. I examine three widely employed types of premises that appear in such arguments. These are: appeals to a state of "cosmic war," appeals to the afterlife, and appeals to sacred values.

The first three chapters of the book contain background material. Because my analysis is informed by recent work in psychology, cognitive science, neuroscience, and evolutionary biology, there is much ground to cover before we analyze religious justifications for violence. In Chapter 1, some violent actions that have been undertaken in the name of religion are discussed and two influential views about the relationship between religion, justification, and violence (or the lack of such a relationship) are considered and rejected. I also discuss and define the key terms "justification" and "violence," as well as examine the relationship between nature and "supernature," which underpins many of the metaphysical postulates developed by the religious. In the second chapter, I discuss influential generalizations about religion and assess which of these stands

up to scientific scrutiny. I argue that religion has evolved and I consider competing views about how this has happened. I argue in favor of the view that religion is an evolutionary adaptation. I then offer a new, empirically informed, definition of religion. Chapter 3 is about morality. I consider the evolution of morality, the role of culture in shaping morality, and recent work in social psychology and neuroscience on moral judgment. All of this leads up to an overall characterization of the relationship between morality and religion. Readers who are well informed about any of the background topics discussed in Chapters 1, 2, and 3 may safely skip over the sections in which these topics are discussed.

In Chapter 4 I consider ordinary secular justifications for violence and explore how these can be reconciled with consequentialist and deontological accounts of morality. I then look at the ethics of war, just war theory, and pacifist objections to war. I also consider traditional religious justifications for war, many of which involve the supposition that a cosmic struggle is taking place between the forces of good and the forces of evil. I show that appeals to cosmic war make it easy to justify a range of behavior that would be harder to justify in conventional wars by the standards of just war theory. In Chapter 5, the role that afterlife beliefs can play in justifying religious violence is considered. I concentrate on arguments in the Christian tradition that appeal to the importance of salvation to justify violent actions directed at heretics and apostates, as well as arguments in the Buddhist tradition that appeal to beliefs about the cycle of reincarnation to justify violence. I also examine religious justifications for suicide that appeal to the afterlife. In Chapter 6, I consider the role that sacred values play in religious justifications of violence. I look at Durkheim's classic analysis of the sacred, as well as recent work in psychology and negotiation studies on sacred values, along with some contemporary work in cognitive science and neuroscience on sacralization. I end the chapter by arguing that ordinary reasoning about sacred values is a form of ordinary deontological moral reasoning.

Chapter 7 contains a series of recent case studies in which violent action has been taken, and religious justifications for this violence have been offered, either by the perpetrators, or by sympathetic co-religionists. Six case studies are examined. I look at two religious groups from the United States, *The Gatekeepers* and *Heaven's Gate*, and also a religiously inspired American anti-abortion activist, Scott Roeder. I consider a religious group based in Japan, *Aum Shinrikyo*, as well as followers of the Rabbi Meir Kahane, who have committed acts of violence in Israel. Lastly, I consider

religious justifications for violence offered by representatives of the international organization *al-Qaeda*. In all six case studies, it is demonstrated that the justifications offered for violent action carried out in the name of religion appeal to cosmic war, the afterlife, or sacred values, or some combination of these three factors.

Chapter 8 is about religious tolerance. I consider what tolerance is and how religious tolerance is justified in liberal democratic states. I then examine evidence from social psychology about whether religion promotes tolerance or intolerance. I go on to consider whether promoting the value of religious tolerance could be an effective way to persuade those who believe that they are justified by their religion in acting violently to refrain from acting violently. In Chapter 9, I consider some other possible ways to persuade those who believe that violent action is justified by religion, and who are motivated to act violently, to nevertheless refrain from acting violently. I also consider whether, and to what extent, religiously tolerant liberal societies can and should tolerate religious groups that believe that they are justified in acting violently on behalf of their religion.

Throughout the book I follow a common, abbreviated way of writing and refer to attempted justifications simply as justifications. It should be clear enough, from context, when I am referring to an attempt to justify some or other doctrine, or instance of violent action, and when I am referring to justifications that meet the standards that we ordinarily accept as successfully justifying violent action. The justification of any form of violence is a controversial topic and there will be some readers who will not regard the standards that most people ordinarily accept as justifying violent action as sufficiently rigorous. Some readers will hold that we ought to apply more rigorous standards to all attempts to justify violence, including those that appeal to religion. Other readers, especially avid pacifists, will suppose that we can never offer successful justifications for any violent behaviour. Although I discuss pacifist objections to war in Chapter 4, a proper consideration of pacifist objections to the standards that most of us ordinarily apply to justifications of violence is beyond the scope of this work.

The book had its origins in a grant application, on "Science and Religious Conflict'" which I developed, together with Julian Savulescu, director of the Oxford Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics, the Institute for Science and Ethics, in the Oxford Martin School, and the Oxford Centre for Neuroethics, all at the University of Oxford. Julian and I wanted to take recent work in social psychology, cognitive science, neuroscience and evolutionary biology and apply this to shed light on the nature of religious conflict; and

also to suggest ways to reduce religious conflict. Our application was generously funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the United Kingdom and ran from the beginning of 2009 to mid-2012 (Standard Grant AH/F019513/1). In addition to this book, the Science and Religious Conflict project resulted in two major international conferences, a number of academic papers, and an edited volume, *Religion, Intolerance and Conflict: A Scientific and Conceptual Investigation*, edited by Steve Clarke, Russell Powell, and Julian Savulescu (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013). Julian and I were fortunate enough to have been able to employ Russell Powell to work on the grant. I benefited enormously from the opportunity to work with Julian and Russell, as well as the opportunity to work at the Uehiro Centre and in the Oxford Martin School. Work on the latter stages of this book was generously supported by the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, Charles Sturt University.

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Justification, Religion, and Violence

September 11 (1857)

At dawn on September 7, 1857, a wagon train of emigrants camped at Mountain Meadows in southern Utah unexpectedly found themselves under attack. The emigrants – the Fancher–Baker party – were making their way from Arkansas to California. They numbered approximately 120, including men, women, and children of various ages, and they had perhaps 700 head of cattle with them. The attackers aimed coordinated barrages of gunfire at the party from different directions and their initial assault is reported to have resulted in seven deaths (Walker, Turley, and Leonard 2008, p. 158). However, that initial attack was soon repelled by the emigrant group who corralled their wagons and proceeded to fight off their assailants over the next five days. The attacking party was dressed as American Indians, and indeed some of them were Southern Paiute Indians. But the majority were white and were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons). There were reports of fractious interactions between members of the Fancher–Baker party and Mormons whom they had encountered when passing through Utah (Bagley 2002, p. 98; Walker et al. 2008, p. 87).[1] However, the party posed no threat to the Utahn Mormon community and were about to leave Utah for good.

In the late morning of September 11, a sub-group of the assailants removed their disguises and approached the corral, pretending to be representatives of a sympathetic local militia who could broker a deal

The Justification of Religious Violence, First Edition. Steve Clarke.

between the emigrants and their Indian assailants. In exchange for livestock and supplies the representatives of the militia claimed that they would be able to persuade the assailants to cease hostilities and they would provide the emigrants with safe passage to nearby Cedar City. The emigrants were suspicious of the negotiating party, having seen through the disguises of their mainly white assailants; but as they were running low on water and ammunition, they felt that they had little choice but to accept the offer (Walker et al. 2008, p. 196), which was, as they feared, a "decoy." The remaining members of the Fancher–Baker party, who had managed to survive five days of besiegement, left their corral and were ambushed soon after by other members of the Mormon-led assailant group. Every adult and every child over the age of six was massacred and their bodies hastily buried. The only survivors were seventeen small children and infants, who were adopted into nearby Mormon families, under the erroneous assumption that they would all be too young to remember the shocking events that had transpired.

Historians who have examined the events surrounding the Mountain Meadows massacre disagree about whether or not Brigham Young, the then President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, had a hand in orchestrating the massacre, but all seem to agree that at least some senior figures in the church were involved in planning the massacre and in the attempted cover-up that followed.[2] Although there were many participants in the massacre, only one man was ever convicted for his actions and this conviction occurred almost twenty years after the event. The convicted man was John D. Lee, one of the ringleaders of the attacking party. Lee considered himself to be a scapegoat for the consequences of decisions made by church leaders; and although he admitted that he had killed some of the members of the Fancher–Baker party, he did not consider that he had done anything wrong. He believed that he was following just orders given to him by legitimate religious authorities. In his words: "I was guided in all that I did which is called criminal, by the orders of the leaders in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints."[3] All of this information may come as a huge surprise to the many people who are unfamiliar with the events of September 11, 1857. The Mountain Meadows massacre has been largely forgotten and Mormons are not particularly associated with violence these days.

The massacre may have had a political motive.[4] In 1857, Utah was a semi-independent territory of the USA and was majority Mormon and

politically dominated by the leadership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. As well as being President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Brigham Young was Governor of Utah Territory at the time. The church leaders were enmeshed in a complicated struggle to retain as much of their independence as they could from the distant, but ever-encroaching, "gentile" United States government in Washington. Some of them believed that the US government did not appreciate the role that Mormons played as protectors of the many white emigrants traveling westwards to California through partially colonized territory inhabited by potentially hostile Indian tribes. Furthermore, they believed that it would be politically advantageous to the Mormons if the government came to value this role and that an Indian massacre of white emigrants might help make their point. After Brigham Young announced that the Indians would no longer be "held back" by the Utahn Mormon community, attempts were made by some of the Mormons to encourage local Indians to conduct an attack on emigrants traversing Utah (Walker et al. 2008, p. 137); and when these were unsuccessful a plan to fake an Indian massacre was hatched (Walker et al. 2008, pp. 140). Unfortunately for the conspirators, the attempt to present the massacre that did take place as the work of local Indians was considered extremely unconvincing by the mainstream American media, who laid the blame for it squarely on the Mormon community of Utah. Some newspapers called for military reprisals against that community (Bagley 2002, pp. 190–1).[5]

Upon reading the above political explanation of the motives for the massacre, the average person is unlikely to be any less appalled than they were when first told that the massacre took place. The slaughter of over one hundred people for political advantage is appalling, not because it might fail to serve a political end, but because it seems highly immoral to most of us to kill people who pose no threat, regardless of whether this is for political gain or not. For many, the immorality of the massacre will seem all the more appalling and astonishing given that its perpetrators were deeply religious people. However, many Utahn Mormons of the period did not consider the massacre to be either immoral, or unjustified; and Lee was able to appeal to nineteenth-century Mormon theology to justify his actions. Lee and other Mormons believed that the adults of the Fancher–Baker party had committed serious sins and that they needed others to "shed their blood for the remission of their sins" (Bagley 2002, p. 321). According to the doctrine of "blood atonement," there are some sinful acts that are so serious that

one cannot properly atone for them without being killed. In the words of Brigham Young:

> There are sins that men commit for which they cannot receive forgiveness in this world, or in that which is to come, and if they had their eyes open to see their true condition, they would be perfectly willing to have their blood spilt upon the ground, that the smoke thereof might ascend to heaven as an offering for their sins; and the smoking incense would atone for their sins, whereas, if such is not the case, they would stick to them and remain upon them in the spirit world.[6]

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints does not appear to have maintained an official list of sins that might require blood atonement. The threat of blood atonement was made against those who kill the innocent or commit acts of heresy (Coates 1991, p. 64), as well as those who commit adultery (Walker et al. 2008, p. 25), aide apostates, or marry apostates (Coates 1991, pp. 65–6). It is not entirely clear what the adult members of the Fancher–Baker party did to warrant blood atonement.[7] One suggestion is that they may have been harboring apostates who were trying to escape Mormon Utah (Bagley 2002, p. 147). Another suggestion is that members of the party had boasted that they had been involved in the 1844 murder of Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism (Bagley 2002, p. 117). A third suggestion is that members of the party had murdered local Indians by poisoning them (Bagley 2002, pp. 106–8). Lee and the other perpetrators of the massacre understood that non-Mormons would not accept the doctrine of blood atonement and the doctrine was a religious one, not written into Utahn law, so there was no prospect of applying it through legal channels. By blaming local Indians for the massacre, Lee are his collaborators would have hoped to be able to "blood atone" the adult members of the Fancher–Baker party without incurring the wrath and retribution of non-Mormon American "gentiles."

The doctrine of blood atonement justifies the killing of particular people by appeal to improvements in the quality of the afterlife that those people can be expected to experience. Just like mainstream Christians, Mormons believe in an eternal afterlife. Unlike many mainstream Christians, they do not believe that only followers of the true religion will experience a good afterlife. However, only those who receive the atonement of Jesus Christ are eligible for the most desirable form of afterlife, which is to live in a state of "exaltation" with God. According to the doctrine of blood atonement, the

atonement of Jesus Christ is not available to certain categories of sinners, unless they have died by having their blood spilled on the ground. If this doctrine is correct, then to kill such people is to do them a favor. It is perhaps the greatest possible favor that one could do for them. The benefits of being eligible for the atonement of Jesus Christ are extremely significant and last for ever, so these easily outweigh the harms involved in having a life violently shortened. The doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints have continued to develop over the years as the church has carved out a place in mainstream America. The church formally renounced polygamy in the late nineteenth century and it repudiated the doctrine of blood atonement at much the same time.[8]

Religion and Violence

The Mountain Meadows massacre was an extremely violent, mass killing of civilians, instigated by religious believers. It is far from unique in these respects; and the resulting death toll is not particularly remarkable. The 1572 St. Bartholomew's day massacre of Huguenots in Paris by Catholic mobs led to at least 5,000 deaths. The Wadda Ghalughara – a massacre of Sikhs by Muslims – which took place in 1764, led to the death of 25,000 – 30,000 Sikhs. And violent killing motivated by religious conviction continues to this day. The attacks by al-Qaeda on the United States of America on September 11, 2001, resulted in the deaths of almost 3,000 people. Potentially even more deadly were the sarin gas attacks on the Tokyo subway system, which were carried out by members of the syncretist religious group Aum Shinrikyo on March 20, 1995. These coordinated attacks on commuters, during morning rush hour, were intended to kill tens of thousands of people, but due to flaws in the plan of attack they only resulted in twelve deaths, along with injuries to approximately 6,000 (Kaplan and Marshall 1996, p. 251). Most of the perpetrators of both of these recent sets of events appear to have considered them to be justified by the lights of their respective religions.

Massacres of civilians that are motivated by religion capture our attention, in part because they seem particularly hard to understand, especially if we start off with the widely accepted view that religion is generally a force for peace. But, in attempting to understand religious violence, we should not lose sight of the many forms of violent action, apart from the massacre of civilians, which have sometimes come to be seen as justified by religion.

Religion is often invoked as a justification for war. Sometimes religious leaders advise their followers that they are justified in participating in wars that have already commenced, and sometimes religious leaders agitate for military campaigns to take place, on the grounds that these are justified by the lights of their religion. The nine Christian Crusades to the Near East, between 1095 and 1291, are examples of this latter form of religiously sanctioned military campaign. Religious justifications are presented for the killing of many different species of animals as sacrifices to supernatural beings. In some cases humans have been among the species sacrificed. Religious motives are invoked to try to justify the killing of individuals because they have attempted to leave a religion (apostasy), because they have tried to revise a religion (heresy), and because they have spoken or written disrespectfully about a religion (blasphemy). Religion has been invoked, and continues to be invoked, in the Hindu tradition, to warrant the killing of brides whose husbands happen to have died before them. It has been used to justify suicide and in some instances, such as the case of the 1978 Jonestown massacre, in Guyana, where over 900 people died, to justify mass suicide. Religion has also been used to justify a variety of other forms of self harm, voluntarily accepted harm, and harm imposed against people's wishes.[9]

There have been many recent books written about the relationship between religion and violence and a debate ensues between those who argue that religion is a significant cause of violence (e.g., Avalos 2005; Juergensmeyer 2003) and those who consider that, while religion is prone to being used as a pretext for violence, it is not itself a significant cause of violence (e.g., Cavanaugh 2009; Ward 2006). This debate ranges over the appropriate interpretation of a series of historical events. Was the Spanish conquest of the Aztec and Inca empires and forcible conversion of their inhabitants to Christianity driven by religion, or by a desire for empire, or was it driven by some combination of the two? Were the Crusades primarily motivated by religious concerns, or were there broader political goals that really explain why they took place? Were the early twentieth-century European fascist movements secular movements, or were they indirectly fueled by religion? The recent upsurge in interest in the relationship between religion and violence has, of course, been provoked by the events of September 11, 2001, and a specific debate about the role that religion plays in motivating Islamic terrorism is also taking place. Some commentators, such as Pape (2005) and Goodin (2006), explain the behavior of modern Islamic terrorists in purely political terms. Other

commentators, such as Lincoln (2003) and Ignatieff (2004), insist that contemporary Islamic terrorism cannot be properly understood without understanding its distinctively religious dimension.

The argument presented in this book is not directed at understanding the overall relationship between religion and violence. The target is much more specific. I seek to understand and explain the ways in which religion can be used to justify violent activities. I will not address the issue of whether particular instances of violence that are justified by religion are actually caused by religion, actually caused by political factors, or actually caused by some combination of religion and political factors. Religion can be used to justify violent actions that have various different causes and it is the justifications offered in the name of religion that are the subject of investigation here. Insofar as the argument in this book is directed against anyone, it is directed against scholars such as Charles Selengut, who expresses the common view that " … ordinary judgment, canons of logic, and evaluation of behavior simply do not apply to religious activity" (2003, p. 6). As I will show, the religious generally justify their activities in much the same way as the secular and these justifications generally follow the same canons of logic as secular justifications. Religious arguments justifying violence are structurally similar to secular ones, but the religious are able to feed many more premises into those structures than the non-religious. The religious are able to appeal, among other things, to God's wishes, God's commands, the benefits of going to heaven, the benefits of avoiding hell, the benefits of being reincarnated as a superior being, and the benefits of escaping from the cycle of reincarnation, as well as all of the justificatory sources that are appealed to by the secular.

It may be tempting to try to deploy my conclusion within the debate about whether or not religion causes violence and argue that, because the religious have more conceptual resources to draw on, when attempting to justify violence, than the non-religious, they can be expected to justify more violent acts than the non-religious; and consequently, they can be expected to cause more violence than the non-religious. But this line of reasoning is highly speculative. Being able to draw on more conceptual resources to justify violence does not ensure that the religious will attempt to justify more violent acts than the non-religious, and nor does it ensure that the religious will cause more violence than the non-religious. A further reason to resist the conclusion that the religious cause more violence than the non-religious is that religion also provides conceptual resources to opponents of violence. These include pacifist religious doctrines – which we will have more to say

about in Chapter 4 – as well as doctrines that might be taken to obviate the need for violent action, such as the doctrine that God providentially guides human history to ensure that everything ultimately turns out for the best.

Are religious justifications of violence more effective than secular justifications of violence? If I am right that religious justifications of violence are structurally similar to secular justifications of violence, the answer to this question depends on one's assessment of the credibility of the premises that are fed into religious and secular arguments justifying violence. Those who accept the relevant religion are liable to find arguments that appeal to premises supported by their own religious tradition to be very credible, whereas followers of other religions, as well as atheists and agnostics, are liable to find these same arguments to be quite implausible, because they do not accept the relevant premises. When and where particular religions hold sway, arguments that appeal to premises deemed acceptable by followers of the dominant religion may well be more effective than secular arguments at justifying violence; however, at other times and in other places, secular arguments for the justification of violence can be expected to be more effective.

For convenience, I am following a common, abbreviated way of writing (and speaking) – as was mentioned in the Preface – and will refer to attempted justifications simply as justifications. I do not mean to imply that I regard all or any of these as successful justifications. Nor do I mean to imply that the justifications offered, under consideration here, are necessarily motivating of the actions that are justified, or necessarily play a role in causing actual behavior. In the remainder of this first chapter I will consider a number of conceptual and background issues that need to be clarified in order to analyze religious justifications of violence. I begin with analysis of the key terms "violence" and "justification." Neither of these is especially hard to understand, but given the centrality of both terms to this book, it is important that I am clear about how they are used here.

Violence

The exact meaning of the term "violence" is disputed. For the purposes of this discussion I will understand violence narrowly as *action which is intended to cause physical harm*. There are various ways in which this definition might be extended. Robert Audi argues that we should include mention of psychological harm in any definition of violence, alongside physical harm

(1971, p. 52). There may be good reasons for doing so, especially if we are trying to capture the general significance of harms in our definition. Some instances of psychological harm will have a deeper, more profound effect on people's lives than many instances of physical harm. If I punch you in the face, you will be physically harmed to a certain extent and perhaps you will experience indirectly caused psychological harm, alongside the black eye that I give you. If I use psychological "brainwashing" techniques to manipulate you into joining an extremist religious group and indirectly cause you to quit your job, give away all your money, and cut off all contact with your family then, all things being equal, you will suffer more deeply felt, longer lasting harm than in the punch scenario. Similarly, symbolic harms may have more of an impact on peoples' lives than some physical ones. You might be more hurt when you see me burn your national flag than you would be if I'd punched you. So, perhaps symbolic harms should be included in a definition of violence too. Selengut defines violence in a way that includes threats of harm as well as actual harms (2003, p. 9) and again there may be reasons to define violence this way. Some threats may have more of an impact on people's lives than some actual physical harms.[10] I don't have any particular objection to these extensions of the core conception of violence. However, as I want my analysis of religious violence to be acceptable to the widest possible audience, I will restrict my use of the term "violence" to refer to the class of cases that are most uncontroversially described as violent – actions intended to cause physical harm.

There are two further approaches to defining violence that I will also avoid. These are both stipulative, and are not directed at capturing the ordinary meaning of the term "violence." Neither would be helpful for my analysis. One of these broadens the concept of violence in an unhelpful way and the other restricts it, again in an unhelpful way. Johan Galtung (1969) broadens the concept violence to include "structural violence." The structures in question are institutional arrangements that operate to restrict peoples' choices, so as to lead to an absence of "social justice," which Galtung equates with an "egalitarian distribution of power and resources" (1969, p. 183). On this view all, or nearly all, contemporary societies count as intrinsically violent because they are not specifically structured so as to promote egalitarian ideals and because they allow unequal distributions of power and resources to be reproduced. Furthermore, all religious organizations that are hierarchical and distribute power and resources unequally will count as intrinsically violent – that is, nearly all religious organizations. The problem with this way of defining violence is that it posits several interlaid levels of violence,

which are not distinguished from one another; and so it constantly threatens to confuse our thinking about violence. There is intrinsic institutional violence, violent law, more general violent social arrangements, and violent acts. I am interested in understanding specific relations between religion, justification, and a narrowly understood class of intended harms. Because I want to understand this specific set of relations, I need to reject this overly broad definition of one of my key terms, which can only lead to confusion.

Sidney Hook restricts the range of the meaning of the concept of violence by advocating a stipulative "legitimist" definition of violence (Coady 2008, p. 23). He defines violence as " … the illegal employment of methods of physical coercion for personal or group ends".[11] This definition is so constructed as to prevent the word violence from being used to refer to (or criticize) current institutional arrangements, even if these result in physical harms to individuals. On Hook's view, a state that employed its army or police force to hurt or kill members of religious minorities, who were in violation of laws suppressing the practice of their religion, would not be acting violently. This restriction on meaning is too limiting for my analysis. Because I am concerned to examine the relationship between religion, justification, and intended acts that physically harm people it would be very unhelpful for me to employ a definition of violence that had built into it the denial of the very possibility that some religiously motivated intentional acts which physically harm people could count as violent.

Justification

If you ask someone why they have acted in a particular way you could either be asking them for an explanation or a justification of their behavior. Usually it is clear enough, in context, whether an explanation or a justification is expected. The career bank robber Willie Sutton (1901 – 1980) is famous for a joke that plays on this ambiguity. When Sutton was asked by a journalist why he robbed banks he is said to have replied "because that's where the money is!" The joke works because we are expecting that he will try to justify his behavior – try to convince us, despite our strong feelings to the contrary, that it is acceptable for him to rob banks, or at least identify some mitigating factors, making him seem less culpable for his crimes – and instead he provides a very straightforward explanation of that behavior in terms of means – end rationality. In general, a justification is the proper grounds one has for an action or belief. When I provide a justification I am doing

more than simply describing a series of thought processes that lead to a conclusion. Rather, I am selecting a reason, or set of reasons, that motivates my action, and which I believe to have sufficient normative force to warrant that action. Not all of my motives will have such normative force.[12]

Justifications need to be distinguished from excuses. When I provide a justification for a course of action, I am implying that it was an appropriate course of action to take, under the circumstances. In making this implication I also reveal that I take responsibility for the course of action in question. When I offer an excuse I do not attempt to imply that my course of action was appropriate. I concede that it was inappropriate, even though I also concede that I undertook that course of action. But in offering an excuse, I attempt to convince my audience that there are mitigating circumstances that either absolve me of responsibility for the course of action in question, or at least diminish that responsibility. If Willie Sutton had replied to the journalist by saying that a mafia boss was threatening to kill his relatives if he did not keep robbing banks, or told the journalist that he was suffering from a rare form of psychological compulsion and couldn't help robbing banks, try as he might to resist this unusual compulsion, he would be offering excuses rather than justifications for his actions.[13]

Suppose I am sunbathing at a beach and I see a man in the sea who is in danger of drowning and in obvious need of assistance; I also notice a sign put up by the local council warning of a strong undertow and forbidding swimming in the area. Suppose further that I decide, despite the risk to my own safety, to break the law and swim over to him and offer assistance. If I am asked to justify my illegal action I might say something like the following: I am under a moral obligation to attempt to save the lives of those who need immediate assistance, and I consider that the importance of this moral obligation outweighs my responsibility to obey the local law. This justifying consideration might not be my only motive. I might also think to myself that being seen taking a significant risk to save a life will help me to impress a woman who I am romantically interested in and who happens to be at the beach. While this desire motivates me, I do not consider it to be a justification for my action. I do not consider that my desire to impress a romantic interest ought to be grounds to violate the local law. An overall explanation of my behavior would include mention of this additional motive, but as I consider that it lacks normative force, I do not mention it when I am asked to justify my behavior.

Participation in the process of presenting justifications for our behavior places constraints on behavior and if we are to understand human behavior

properly it is important that we understand this process. An extremely important constraint that the justificatory process imposes is a consistency constraint. If I consider it justifiable to break a local council's law and risk my own safety in order to save a life, and I swim over to offer assistance to a drowning person on one occasion, then I am logically committed to doing so on all other such occasions which involve an equivalent risk, including those that might occur when the attractive woman, whom I am trying to impress, is not present. People will tend to judge my behavior according to whether or not it conforms to this consistency constraint. When I risk my life to save another person from drowning I enhance my reputation by convincing people that I am the sort of person who will take risks to protect the lives of others. If, however, I fail to act consistently and fail to take equivalent risks to protect the lives of others on other similar occasions, then people will start to question whether I was actually motivated by the consideration that I claimed had justificatory force. If they can find another motive that explains the inconsistency in my actions, such as the desire to impress the woman I am attracted to, then they will be liable to conclude that my stated justification for action is insincere and my reputation can be expected to suffer accordingly.

Statements that people make justifying their actions and beliefs often include a rhetorical component as well as a logical one; and this rhetorical component can make their justification seem more compelling. If I claim that legal sanctions against homosexual activity are justified, and go on to explain that this is because God determines what is right and wrong, the Bible contains God's determinations and it tells us in the Bible that God considers homosexual acts to be morally wrong, then I am providing an unadorned justification of a normative claim. If I exclaim "God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve!" I am effectively making much the same claim, but am doing so with a rhetorical flourish that makes the assertion much more memorable and more convincing to many.

Here I will be concerned with the logical structure of justifications of acts of religious violence, rather than the efficacy of rhetoric.[14] There is much more that could be said about the psychological effects of dressing up justificatory claims in this or that rhetorical form, as well as about the difficulties that people have distinguishing logically well-formed arguments from appeals to rhetoric. Much of this is important to appreciate if we aim at a comprehensive understanding of how religion can cause violence. For example, demonizing members of out-groups and describing them as "rats," "vermin," "parasites," "cockroaches," and so on seems to be an effective way

of activating someone's sense of disgust, and encourages a propensity to think of those out-group members as a threat to the health of one's own community that needs to be removed (Navarrete and Fessler 2006; Faulkner et al. 2004). Psychological research teaches us much about these techniques; and it is important that these are well understood. But work on this important task will not be advanced here.

Another important lesson to be learned from the psychological literature – which I mention here in order to head off a common sort of misunderstanding – is that the vast majority of people who act violently do not appear to view inflicting harm on others as an end in itself and do not appear to gain particular enjoyment from harming others. Comic book villains may enjoy inflicting harm on others, but the overwhelming majority of people who act violently are psychologically unlike comic book villains. They do not laugh maniacally or otherwise express delight when harming others. Most people who commit violent acts do so reluctantly and only after they have overcome internal constraints that would ordinarily make them feel guilty about harming others. When they do act violently, they do so in the belief that what they are doing is justifiable, all things considered (Baumeister 2001, pp. 60–96). Or at least this is how most perpetrators of violent acts see things at the time that they commit those acts. There are, of course, exceptions to this generalization, especially amongst psychopaths who lack internal constraints against harming others (Hare 1999) and some sadists, whose enjoyment of hurting others leads them to overcome feelings of guilt much more easily than ordinary people (Baumeister and Campbell 1999, pp. 214–15). It is important that the psychology of these exceptional cases be well understood, but this is not the subject under consideration here.

What I am interested in identifying here is what religion adds to the process by which humans justify violence. One possible answer to this question is "anything and everything." Justification is a normative process, and whatever norms there are that can be legitimately appealed to exist because God (or some other supernatural agent or agents) created them. Morality is entirely derivative of religion, or so says the "divine command theorist." This view may seem somewhat hard to accept, because it involves accepting that if God had stipulated that it is morally obligatory to torture kittens and morally impermissible to give money to charity, then it would be morally obligatory to torture kittens and morally impermissible to give money to charity. The rightness and wrongness of particular acts do not seem to be the sort of qualities that could be dependent on the simple stipulation of God or any other supernatural agent.[15]

One does not have to be a divine command theorist, though, to hold that our moral beliefs and practices are largely the product of our religion. A convincing rebuttal of this more general view will require a deeper understanding of religion and a deeper understanding of the relationship between morality and religion. In the next chapter I will attempt to provide a deeper understanding of religion and in the following chapter I will turn my attention to morality. I will go on to argue that the tendency to hold religious beliefs and engage in religious behavior (henceforth just "religion") is something that evolved in human populations over time and that morality, or at least a certain basic sort of morality, was a necessary precursor to the evolution of religion. In order to continue to function, human communities require a certain minimal form of moral structure. The human communities in which religion evolved were moral communities in this bare sense and if, at any point, a religion which undermined that minimal moral structure became dominant in a particular community, the community in question would have collapsed, taking the support base for that religion with it. Religion might be invoked to try to justify anything and everything, but religions that do not succeed in making the justifications that they offer consistent with this minimal moral structure do not survive the test of time.

Nothing Bad

Another answer to the question of what religion adds to the justificatory process is "nothing bad." Charles Kimball assures us that authentic religion is always a force for good and only "corrupted religion" leads to violence (2008, pp. 199–200). He also tells us that:

> Whatever religious people may say about their love of God or the mandates of their religion, when their behavior towards others is violent and destructive, when it causes suffering among their neighbors, you can be sure the religion has been corrupted and reform is desperately needed. (Kimball 2008, p. 47)

Similarly, Keith Ward understands religious justifications for violent action as being based on misinterpretations of scripture which,

> ignore the weightier matters of scriptures – the love of God and neighbour, and the search for compassion and mercy – and choose texts taken out of context and applied without any sense of history or concern for general traditions of interpretation. (Ward 2006, p. 37)