

The history of Europe in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is overshadowed by the discourse of “struggle” (class struggle, the battle of the sexes, the fight for minority rights, the struggle of the colonised against the colonisers, the fight against Islamic terrorism, etc.). Yet the concept itself is not clearly defined, and appears to have led to a number of misunderstandings. The literature on the subject remains sparse, but it does sketch an outline of the discussion. Its axes are formed by two main approaches to the issue of struggle, focused around the categories of aggression and conflict. [...]

The main problem today is that violence is mistaken for struggle, or rather that the two are conflated. The consequences of this error cannot be overstated. Whereas struggle can and ought to be something respectable and even beautiful, violence can never be regarded as such. It is nothing more than the manifestation and exploitation of one entity’s advantage over another. Violence is invariably disproportional; it is an expression of the power of one and the powerlessness of another. Naturally, it can be employed in the service of good (for example, I can use violence to give an unwilling child medicine that is critical to its health). Still, it is justifiable to regard violence with mistrust. While struggle, debate, and conflict are indispensable features of social life and consequences of society’s creative impulses, violence itself is an example of the dark and disgraceful elements of the social realm. One can think of it as a “technique”: the art of exploiting one’s own advantage to strike, hurt, or score against the adversary. In this perspective, violence is a component of struggle, or the method by which struggle is carried out. Outside of this narrow scope – when violence is no longer a means of struggle, but a way to achieve dominance and exercise power – there is a significant difference between the two. This matter warrants careful consideration, especially in twenty-first century Europe, where to mount a struggle against anyone is to invite accusations of violence or the intended use thereof.

Violence is employed by one person against another. Even this simple statement reveals that one entity is clearly less powerful, passive, powerless, or at least not resisting. The other, by contrast, is active and causative. We should note here that it is possible for the weaker side to use violence against the stronger opponent. After all, the latter side may choose not to use its strength, and decide not to actively resist or counterattack. Struggle is different: one struggles with someone over something. It is thus an act that involves some basic solidarity between those engaged in it. The term “negative cooperation” is insufficient here because, as I mentioned previously, it fails to capture the axiological foundations of the covenant binding the adversaries. Struggle, on the other hand, presupposes the existence of truths worth fighting for. Paradoxically, it is there-

fore an alliance formed in pursuit of an idea. It occurs between subjects who are motivated and capable of action, ones whose spiritual worlds are circumscribed and possess their own measures and ideals. Violence is different. It is neither a form of solidarity nor covenant. It is fundamentally egocentric. A person engaged in struggle is guided by the will to determine the truth and by the desire for victory. Here, victory is, above all else, the triumph of the cause one is fighting for. In the case of violence, primacy is placed not on truth, but on demands; not on the desire for victory, but for domination. Struggle is also deeply linked to duty. First, to engage in struggle is (or can be) one’s duty. Second, struggle itself is waged with the goal of understanding the essence of one’s duty.

Excerpts translated by Arthur Barys



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JUSTYNA
MELONOWSKA

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Justyna Melonowska is a psychologist and holds a PHD in philosophy. Member of the European Society of Women in Theological Research. She works at The Maria Grzegorzewska University in Warsaw. Her texts have been published in Polish newspapers and magazines, including “Więź”, “Gazeta Wyborcza”, “Newsweek”, “Tygodnik Powszechny”, and “Christianitas”.