Civilization, I'll stay right here!

Introduction

A man, we would say in his thirties or forties, probably younger, stands in the middle of the savannah, looking to the horizon. He wears nothing but rustic underwear and a weapon of unknown name, handmade by himself. As we cannot ask him, we assume: he appeared almost out of nowhere, grown-up already, male, skilled, prepared for. If he had a mother or a group, it was a long time ago, almost like they never existed. Soon there will be the time to eat, or to defend himself from a beast perhaps – and that would not be a problem, since he is for sure stronger than we are. The world may be a rough place, but he is ready to face it, alone, like he always was.

This is the image that we usually make about the primitive human being. Very far from that of the caveman, who is commonly presented as a clumsy man, not smart at all. Since every system of thinking needs to define its own narrative for the nature of humankind, this independent grown-up man would illustration probably tells us something about it. This kind of versions were often used by classic liberalism to propose the image of a humankind based on independence – this is: not just political independence, but also social and mainly economic. The savannah-man usually confront with other of his type, also of the fact that he seems to never needed help from anyone else. What is between this man and we? What happened there?

The explanations on how we went from this total-freedom-state (this is commonly a nostalgic narrative) are varied. Rousseau, for example, says that this state of nature permitted human societies to embrace justice. Similar to Kant, who gives a response based on reason. Both speaks of "civilization". Hanna Arendt can give us an approach to this in *What is authority?* too: "Since authority always demands obedience; it is commonly mistaken for some form of power or violence. Yet authority precludes the use of external means of coercion; where force is used, authority has failed. Authority, on the other hand, is incompatible with persuasion, which presupposes equality and works through a process of argumentation. Where arguments are used, authority is left in abeyance. Against the egalitarian order of persuasion stands the authoritarian order, which is always hierarchical. If authority is to be defended at all, then, it must be in contradistinction to both coercion by force and persuasion through arguments", she argues.

When did the men become to organise society in this way? What is it behind this authority? Arendt's quote has remarkable points that we can sum up in the following way: (1) Authority demands obedience and is hierarchical – commonly mistaken for power or violence; (2) This authority precludes coercion and force; (3) It is also incompatible with persuasion, which (4) proposes equality through argumentation; hence (5) arguments would be the way to confront the force of authority. My aim in this work is to prove that this form of authoritarian organization, which I will take as a description of modern State (since it is the maximum force of hierarchical authority nowadays), does not coincide precisely with

the definition given by Arendt. For this, I will divide my text in two sections. I the first one, I will try to show that authority is no other thing that power, and that violence or coercion are actually needed to force obedience. This I will do by exploring some definitions of State organization, mainly Judith Butler's concept of interdependence and the Marxist explanation of State. In the second section, I will reflect on how to develop a social organization free of violence. For this last, I will take a definition of "civilization" far from the progress-based one, and defining it as a *society organised under the possible minimum expression of violence*. The reason of this is because I believe Arendt's quote does something remarkable, which is to propose a way of facing violence. Otherwise, we would be focusing on something else. Why is that we have to discuss violence? Where did it came from? The savannah-man lost his freedom on gathering with people by creating the State. Could we say that he chose violence? If we went to savage to civilized, is it possible to go the other way back?

Section I: From savage to civilized

What is it between our authoritarian society and the savannah-man wanderlust? Responses to this question usually follow the story on the moment that the savannah-man founded other man like him. It is a narrative based on confrontation and violence, on which one man's power ends up over the other – is not coincidence that classical liberalism often points the motives for this on territory (property), food or even women (because they are always men).

Judith Butler writes about this in her 2021 book *The Force of Non-Violence*. Her approach is interesting. There is no way –she says– that this man got to grow up without the help of a group, of a community. He would have needed someone to take care of him when he ways a baby, someone to help the mother to raise him. There would have been someone that protected him from cold, hunger and danger; someone to taught him how to go haunting or even manage his own weapon. Also, generations of communities to learn the best way to do all this. This is what she calls *interdependence*. Interdependence is the necessary condition for a community to be linked. Is the way of progress, in the sense that it is necessary to have communitarian knowledge to manage essential tasks, such as get food or protect from danger. Communitarian transmission is essential for societies to achieve a good life, in the terms that one community wants it. There are other works, such as Yuval Harari's *From Animals to Gods*, that remark the importance on cooperation in human evolution, giving to the discussion not only an anthropological approach, but also a biological one. That is, human cooperation moulded the way we went through evolution.

Is this cooperation, this interdependence, sufficient condition to be civilized? Certainty no. There is nothing about this way of organise that keeps humankind away from violence. There could be an interdependent community based on confront violently other communities or members of their own. Let's not take the concept as a utopia, but more as

a condition to group people into the structure of a community. We could say interdependence is what a community needs to not disintegrate.

When did this violence appear? Why was not enough to be interdependent? I believe Marxist definition can be a good approach to explore this. The theory explains that the first forms of the State raised with the first forms of slavery. That is, it was the fist time in humankind timeline that a man raised this power over the ability of another to *institutionalize* it. This last is a key concept, because violence might have always existed in nature, but human surely is the first one to make an institution over it. An institution has rules, a structure, hierarchies, roles… As it was institutionalized, institutions must, such as life, to reproduce itself. This dual dynamic oppressor-oppressed is what Marxism recognises all over history. Once it started, it never stopped.

As I think this is a definition historically accurate (and obviously a simplified version of it), I believe it is also theoretically true. Sate is the primacy of one class over another. An institution, in all its structure, which nature is a network of power. This power hierarchizes society. The easiest way to start to think about this hierarchy is on the organization of the modern State itself. Most of them (e.g., presidential or monarchic systems) are organized by a head of State, followed by numbers of functionaries in different levels of political power. But also, in society, State is a hierarchy itself. In almost every definition of State, one of the necessary conditions for a State to rule is to have the monopoly of power. This can be seen in the existence of the military or the police. But also, in extremely violent expressions of the State. Dictatorships in Latin-America during the twentieth century could be a good example: when the State found itself vulnerable over another force, it seems it had to respond with extreme violence. As I just mentioned, the State, as power, takes the form of life: in order to not die, it reproduces itself. The nature of State authority is violent.

Not only on actual physical violence is the State violent – a form of violence for which we could difficulty try to confront. There also another forms of coercion that needs our permission. Taking the approach offered by Isaiah Berlin, the restriction of negative liberty, which one permits, is what allows the government to rule and for us to obey. Just to give an example: If we are driving on the road and find a red light on the corner, we will probably stop, not because the red light has the essence of a stopping force or even because of the negative symbology associated with the red colour. Is because is a rule, a law. What does this mean? It means that society is structured to follow some rules to order community. I renounce to my free circulation freedom and expect for the State to tell me in which extent do I count with it. The same thing happens with voting, but in relation with the institution of State. I will actively go voting for a person to make decisions for me, not only for the country or for other people, but decide on my own life as well. This is similar to Rousseau's idea of "social contract": quitting to my original freedom in order to live in an organized society.

Authority is no other thing that this power. Is not unidirectional, but a complex network. The State, even democratic ones, needs to hierarchize society in order to make this

network possible. In a nutshell, Butler's interdependence is valuable in the sense that it is actually a great analysis of communities, but is not sufficient for explore the function of State, which is the maximum force of authority, not only in theory, but in history too. That is why Marxist definition is a good one to make this point clear, because it shows the violent nature of State and the hierarchical power it has as an institution of coercion. The obedience proposed by Berlin is necessary for coercion to be institutionally successful. This is the network of power that surrounds authority, which under the power of State, it manifests itself in smaller expressions. In the next section, I will reflect on how to construct a way of organization resisting violence, asking myself if there is an alternative or not.

Section II: From civilized to civilization

Once we have a clearer definition of State, which I tried to develop in the last section, I would like to suggest a simplification: State can be in some extent violent, but not always in the larger expression of it. Bringing back the definition of civilization I proposed at the Introduction (this is, a society organised under the possible minimum expression of violence), I would like to reflect on the project of a society like that. What if we face the natural violence of State? Could we finally get a non-violent society?

There is a traditional way of the idea civilization that still is in public discourse. This is the progress-civilization. In the name of progress (technological, economic, political, social… progress), we group in society. But this ideal, the goal of this type of society, does not necessarily assure absence of violence. Instead, it can use violence as a mean for progress. Progress is not a goal free of violence – it depends on what we understand for it, consensus which surely will not have immediate accordance. I would like to propose, then, another project: harmony-civilization, which would take the definition I just have. This is, harmony-civilization is the organization on the possible minimum expression of violence. This definition of civilization, rather than valuate progress as an in utilitarian calculation, focusses on de absence of violence in definition.

But to define harmony-civilization in these terms, is necessary to discuss a method. I would like to distance this project from a utilitarian one, as I just mentioned. I do not want to think this civilization in terms of the summatory of individual happiness, that would eventually make a happy society. This could work on statistics, but not individually. That is: percentage of general happiness can be real high while being truly unfair. What I am proposing is the opposite. Instead of looking for great statistics, for which some could be happier in detriment of other people's happiness, the correct thing would be to give the necessary conditions for a community, as an entity, to make people reduce violence.

What I do not want for this is to be mistaken for a trivial Marxist project. I do not believe that the social control proposed by that theory is the more correct (in fact, modern Marxism has for me a lot of things to adjust these days). But neither it is an approach to anarchism or an anarchist-capitalism, which I find a great way for going to individuality and

constant confrontation – definitely not what I am proposing. What I believe is the truly correct way to construct this harmony-civilization is an organization taking the ideas of Berlin mentioned before. The idea that society is structured to follow rules in order to sustain a community can be applied to this. This is the point where I agree with classic liberalism: I do believe that individual liberty is important, and that guarantee this is necessary to reduce coercion as well. But I also believe that individual liberty cannot coerce the liberty of another, because that would be another way to reproduce coercion. Hence, it is all about balance. The best possible scenario would be to guarantee the maximum expression of individual liberty, with the minimum expression of violence. Work on interdependence would help on this.

Why is it that I believe this is the correct way? This project, that can really be many as it is just a few characteristics, focuses on the reduction of violence, which I believe is the ethically correct approach. Any other project that does not have this objective is not working on violence reduction, but in another aim. This last can lead to violence, or at least let violence occur, as it does not confront violence directly. I also believe –to distance again from anarchism– that trying to change the State to make it non-violent is ethically better than change the whole system. One could say that this kind of approach would definitely guide to a victory of violence, that it is pacifist and that, eventually, violence wins peace, as peace cannot confront it. The problem is this. Confronting violence with more violence, would be multiply the expression of it; but not confronting it, would be let the violence exist and probably reach the non-violent. But my concern is that violence reduction is an urgent project – otherwise, as time goes on, we will only have violence reproducing itself. Violence reduction is not only the correct project, but is also urgent to start it. What I defend, rather than confront, is deactivation. Arendt would say this would have to do with argumentation, which I believe can be a god complement for the process. Disactivate violence, not in the name of the State, but in the name of the community. While State is just the current way of organise, community is the spirit of the society.

Conclusion

In this essay, I reflect on a Hanna Arendt quote from *What is authority?* There, Arendt maintained that authority demands obedience and is hierarchical, and that it is ù commonly mistaken for power, violence, coercion or force. To face authority, she proposed equality through argumentation. To organise my work on this quote, I divided the text in two sections.

In the first section, I defended that authority is no other thing that this power, not unidirectional, but a complex network. As I explored the definitions of Judith Butler interdependence and the Marxist one of State, I concluded that violence and coercion are actually needed to force obedience, concept that I defined following the apports of Isaiah Berlin. With that definition of State in mind, I reflected, in the second section, how to make

a project of community free of violence. For this, I proposed a definition of civilization based on the possible minimum expression of violence, which I called harmony-civilization and distanced it from the one based on progress. As Arendt's quote tried to propose a way to face violence, I stated that this is the only ethically correct project. This is considering that any project with another objective would not be working on actual violence reduction. As it is an urgent problem, I argued that doing it by moulding a State based on this would be ethically better than change the entire system.

Our world is facing wars and extreme violence again. Have we not learnt? Why is it that we are taking this path another time? When we will get the time to construct a non-violent society if we do not allow ourselves to think outside of these violent options? There is an Andrew Sisters' song called *Civilization (Bongo, Bongo, Bongo)*. The whole song is a mockery on how people from central countries evaluate on the population of peripheric ones. What it tries to show is that what we call civilization might not always be the correct thing. It says, at the end of the song: "They have things like the atom bomb / So I think I'll stay where I am / Civilization, I'll stay right here!". The song is from the 40's. Today, after all this time, it seems to be necessary to uphold this statement again.