

The Mark of Cain

And Other Essays
by R. C. Smith

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The Mark of Cain 2018
RC's Gender Manifesto 10/2024
The "Robot Laws" Theory of Morals 2018-08/2019
The Morality of Amoralism 2019-11/2021
Thou Shalt Not Kill 02/2022
Jack-A-Roe, or, To See Ten Thousand Fall 05/2023
Races and Racism 05/2022
Rape, Torture, Murder, Genocide 10/2023

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ABOUT

Mostly I write fiction. On my website you can find my novel *The Journey*, a collection of three stories *Herons and Heroines*, and a number of short stories and vignettes. Most of my stories contain sex and often extreme violence.

My essays complement my stories. If you want to comment or discuss them, you are welcome to contact me. You can find my e-mail address on the page “The Author” on my website.

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THE MARK OF CAIN

Of course, it is just a story. None of the protagonists are real, in the sense that they have ever lived and died, or live eternally. But it is a story that everybody feels they know, and a story that has given rise to a commonly used expression, or portentous metaphor. And almost always it is used wrongly, in direct opposition to its true meaning. This persistent misconception baffles me, because everybody can look it up, it's just a few lines of text in one of the world's allegedly most read books, clear and easy enough to understand. This doesn't bode well for humanity's powers of properly understanding more complex issues, I'm afraid ...

But, this is about the story of Cain, and the mark.

Here is an example — Verdi, Macbeth:

Banquo:

King Duncan has been murdered!

All:

(...) God, you can look into our hearts,
aid us, we trust in you alone.

We look to you for light and counsel
to tear through the veil of darkness.
Deadly castigator let your formidable,
ready anger take the villain
and mark his head as you marked
that of the first murderer.

Not so at all, *All*. Here is the true tale of the mark (Genesis, King James version):

And the LORD said unto Cain, (...) What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.

And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me.

And the LORD said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.

And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden. And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch: and he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch.

Not a punishment, that mark, not a stigma, but a passport, a safeguard for the fugitive. Interestingly, neither God nor Cain, both knowing human nature, doubt that protection is needed for a fugitive, a vagabond, a stranger. But by His mark God doesn't castigate or ostracize the sinner, He enables him to safely settle and live in human society. Get it?

(Of course, Himself being no stranger to murderous fits of anger, God may tend to deal more leniently with this particular sin than with others ...)

RC'S GENDER MANIFESTO

Here are some personal thoughts on gender. If you are looking for misogynist nonsense, stop reading. Do not expect political correctness though, do not expect everything to make sense to you, do not expect logical consistency, and do not expect every remark to be able to withstand scrutiny. A few may be whimsical. Some are very private and entirely subjective. K2 called it an “ode to women” — she didn’t mean it as a praise, but I’m fine with it. If you want to comment, please send me an email.

Not everyone needs to be a feminist. Support equality — equal rights, equal pay, equal opportunities, an equal share of wealth and power — and you will be free of blame. But from a feminist, I expect more.

I am a man by birth, not by choice. It is a reality that I’ve never felt to be in my power to alter, but it does not define where my sympathies lie.

When a female friend said to me, Women are not better than men, I spontaneously replied, “Actually I think we are.” (No, I didn’t. It was my spontaneous response, but the conversation was by mail, and as a rule I edit my thoughts before I type them, so what I wrote was, Actually I think they are.)

I have, of course, encountered women who were stupid, incompetent, thoughtless, selfish, dishonest, malicious, and fraudulent. Still I instinctively feel more comfortable with a female pilot, salesperson, real estate agent, nurse, surgeon, cab driver, computer technician, or anyone else who needs knowledge, skill, commitment, intuition, and empathy for their job. (Yes, I know, this is utterly unfair towards men who can do a great job, and to whom I am grateful for having done so. I just stated whom I feel more comfortable with.)

I always feel more comfortable in the company of women than in that of men.

I have very little interest in sports, but if I ever watch a soccer game, it is women’s soccer. When women compete with men, I am happy when a woman wins. I prefer watching action films with female protagonists. There is little pleasure for me in watching men. I also prefer reading books with female protagonists, I can identify with them better.

Introduced to the Olympic Games in 1968, until 1992 the skeet competition was mixed gender. In 1992 a woman, Zhang Shan from China, won the gold medal. At the next games, in 1996, women were not allowed to compete. Since 2000, separate competitions are held for women and men. Women defeating men in direct competition, when raw muscle power is not a decisive factor, is not appreciated.

I want to see art by female artists, read books by female authors, listen to female singers. This said, there are many male artists of all genres (literature, poetry, visual arts, music) whose works mean very much to me, and who have deeply impressed and formed me. Even if secretly I sometimes wonder how, as men, they could have created such art.

What if a woman feels about men the way I feel about women? She is, of course, entitled to her feelings. It is only men who, to me, are not entitled to their feelings of entitlement that they draw from being male.

I unabashedly state that I like to see women naked. It is important to me, and I cannot get enough of it. Women's faces, women's bodies — the whole silhouette, every part of her body, arms, hands, legs, feet, and of course her breasts, her nipples and her vulva (shaved, so not to hide its beauty), in every detail. There is nothing more beautiful and rewarding to look at, and only sights like sunsets over the sea or full moons over the mountains come close. And cats, of course.

As someone with slightly autistic tendencies I am not good at reading other people's emotions, but I can clearly see that women's faces are much more expressive than men's.

If I were a woman, I would be a lesbian. I have never understood what attraction a male body, or a male mind, may hold. When I see heterosexual porn, I always ask myself, what are they doing here, why are they doing it? But of course everybody's sexual desires are what they are, and need to be accepted. Also, as Andrea Long Chu said, "Most desires aren't desired." She also said, "Most desire is nonconsensual."

If I were a woman, I'd probably proudly be a prostitute. But also, if I were a woman, I could only be *one*. But I would want to be many.

As a writer I write with a female audience in mind (it can be an audience of one). The great majority of my protagonists, including first person narrators, are female. Everyone who has helped me write, with inspiration, thoughts and ideas, comments, proofreading and editing, has been female.

You are welcome to point out to me that women can be child abusers, ruthless murderers, sadistic torturers, cold-blooded or hot-blooded killers, fanatic terrorists, war criminals, accomplices in genocide, anything that a man can be. Yes, this is true. So, I ask, what do we need men for? beiseite lassen

There are no hard-wired differences between male and female brains, they are built the same. But, they mature in different biological and social environments. Even leaving the social aspects aside (which one can't), the biological differences, the different possibilities, strengths and weaknesses of male and female bodies, necessarily influence the minds that develop in them — still, of course, these influences are not deterministic, and differences are gradual and statistical.

Like men, women can be fascinated with and sexually aroused by violence, including sexual violence. Women are not inherently non-violent and peaceful. Still, men may have a greater

affinity to violence because violence can help them to satisfy their sexual desires — for women, in a heterosexual context, finding themselves at the receiving end of violence is what they can more likely expect, and are thus more likely to fantasize about. Unlike for men, for women sexual violence is more easily a threat than a promise. To which degree this contributes to a general attitude towards violence, independent of social factors, is questionable, but the vast majority of gratuitous acts of violence is committed by men.

Violence is a powerful aphrodisiac.

When you have a vagina, you can perform sex at will, which can be useful in many contexts. The downside is that you can be forced to have sex against your will. With a penis, there is always the possibility that you may have to suffer the frustration and humiliation of failing. For men, violence as an aphrodisiac is therefore far more important than for women, and as a bonus it accomplishes the control over the desired object. Again, this may explain the stronger general propensity towards violence in men than in women.

Sexual violence of women, which is rarer though not necessarily less extreme, is usually directed at children. Most of the pleasure of sexual violence comes from scenes being acted out more or less exactly as they had been envisioned in fantasy. Obviously this is more easily achieved when the perpetrator is physically stronger than their victim.

Ponder this: A widely known creation myth tells how a god, whom they call God, has created the world step by step. First, God created the basics — space and time, darkness and light, heaven and earth. Then God created life — first the plants, then the animals of the air, the water and the land. Then God created man. And finally, God created woman. Obviously each step of this creation process involves an increase in complexity and sophistication.

Except for raw physical strength, women are better than men. Statistically, that is, and potentially, when circumstances allow. You do not need to agree, but ponder this: most men openly state or privately feel that men are superior; most women, unless they even agree with that sentiment, insist that women are equal. Reasonability, modesty, unpretentiousness, fairness let them shy away from claiming superiority. Which just proves the point in question, doesn't it?

At the time of the first manned moon flights I heard an interview with a space flight expert (I failed to remember who it was), and the interviewer asked him if he thought that one day there might be female astronauts? That was pure science fiction, at that time we didn't even have female bus drivers. And he said, from a technical point of view female astronauts would be of advantage, as women are smaller, lighter, more enduring, and more intelligent.

Or, as Cato the Elder said more than two millennia ago (though I could not verify the quote), “Remember all the laws by which our forefathers have bound women's liberties, by which they have subjugated women to men's power. As soon as they are equal to us, they will be supreme.”

Women do the majority of work. Do not believe men when, in words or action, they declare to consider women as nothing more than sex objects. Do not believe the enemy, do not even believe their lies. Of course this is what they want, but it also serves as a distraction — they could live without sexually abusing women far more easily than without exploiting them.

Half a century ago, at a sociology course at our University, we were given the task to develop a questionnaire to measure gender prejudices. Questions were of the sort (I don't remember actual wordings), "How do women perform as car drivers compared to men?", on a scale of 1 = worse to 10 = equally good. And I said, "this is biased — to be methodologically correct, the scale would have to go from -10 = worse to 0 = equal to +10 = better." And everyone in the room — male students, female students, and the tutor — looked at me as if I had said, in Klingonian, "All hail to the lizard queen of planet Wega." Yes, I know, Wega isn't a planet, it is a star. Maybe that's why they looked the way they did. After a few seconds of stunned silence, they continued their discussion where it had been so strangely interrupted. This was the moment I realized I wasn't made for an academic career.

Equal rights and equal pay are a matter of course. Or rather, they should be a matter of course. In fact, though, they can hardly be found anywhere. In many parts of the world rights of women are closer to zero than to equal. No parts of the world exist, though, where women are similarly privileged — on an equal rights and equal share scale from 0 to 100, with 50 meaning equality, women are confined to the range of 0 to 45 — for some societies 50 seems within reach, in others it is far removed from any reality. This situation could not, of course, be maintained without structural and manifest violence against women, both at the social level and individually — including rape, including lethal violence, if required, individually as well as on a large scale. In other words, this is not a peaceful competition, this is war.

Politely ask for freedom and equality — appeal to reason, appeal to the generosity and sense of justice of those in power — and you will never get it.

If I were a woman, if I were a feminist fighter, I would not fight for equality. With "equal," you let the enemy define your agenda. Equality, an equal share of power, an equal share of wealth ... do you expect them to respect your reasonability and restraint and to honor them with their goodwill? You are falling for their trap. They'll keep laughing it off. Demand equality, and it will always just stay out of reach, beyond the horizon. Why should women confine themselves to being equal? Why be bound by the "feminine" virtues of modesty, restraint, reasonability, placability and reconciliation? Never doubt your strength. Go for it all, and maybe settle for two thirds as a compromise. Or not. Let *them* fight for equality, if they must. Let them show if they deserve it. Personally, I doubt it.

But I am not a feminist fighter, I am just an observer whom the Lizard Queen of Wega has sent to Earth, and the time keeps drawing nearer when she will call me back to report to her. It is a long journey, and, just in case, I leave my notes here, for my successor to find, and to build on them.

THE “ROBOT LAWS” THEORY OF MORALS

Among popular science fiction memes maybe the one that is most often misunderstood is the set of Isaac Asimov’s three “Laws of Robotics.”

Their wording is simple enough:

1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws.

The point that is usually misunderstood about them is that they are not arbitrary laws like traffic laws or criminal laws — not laws that have been *decreed*, laws that may bring you before a judge or a jury if you break them — they are laws of nature that have been *found*, that have to be understood and observed, or you will not be punished, but meet with failure or disaster. An architect has to understand and observe the laws of static, or the bridge that she builds will collapse. A robot (of the Asimov robot kind) that is designed without having these laws implemented, *will not be stable*. In his stories, Asimov argues in detail how even small deviations from these laws unavoidably lead to severe system failures. A robot has to follow these laws, because it *needs* to — otherwise, being aware of its own power and with nothing to restrain it, it will be out of control.¹

So much for Asimov’s robots. It is entirely moot to discuss if, or how, these laws apply to robotic devices that we are able to build, now or in the foreseeable future. Of course we can, and sadly will, build “intelligent” machines that are designed to kill human beings, but our “artificial intelligence” has nothing to do with the vastly superior robotic minds that Asimov has envisioned — only to them the “Robot Laws” apply. If you want something from our technology to compare, you can think of cars. A car is required to have safety belts. If it didn’t have them, you could still drive it — less safely, but it would still bring you from here to there. A car also has breaks. But this is different — if it didn’t have breaks, it couldn’t be operated, it would be as useless (only more dangerous) as if it didn’t have an engine. In this analogy, the “Robot Laws” are not beneficial like safety belts, they are essential like brakes.

¹ Can’t you understand what the removal of the First Law means? [...] It would mean complete instability, with no nonimaginary solutions to the positronic Field Equations. [...] Physically, and, to an extent, mentally, a robot — any robot — is superior to human beings. What makes him slavish, then? Only the First Law! Without it, the first order you tried to give a robot would result in your death. (Isaac Asimov, *Little Lost Robot*, 1947)

But, this is not about robots, real or imaginary, or cars, or any other machines, this is about the human mind. I suggest that the human analogy to brakes in a car, and to the three Laws of Robotics in an Asimovian robot, is morals. The reason for proposing this analogy is to suggest a non-metaphysical and non-moralistic approach to discussing the existence and specifics of human morality. Morals exist because they have a *function*. A car must have brakes and Asimov's robots must have the Robot Laws implemented or they would not work, and in the same way morals are a necessary element of the human mind — without morals, as its own set of rules, the human mind would not be stable and operational.

(Morals and conscience are closely connected, one could not exist without the other. Conscience is the mechanism by which morals become operative. I'm talking about morals here, because they are thoughts we can be conscious of — what we can talk about. Conscience, as the abstract mental entity that processes our morals, is implied.)

Even Asimov's Robot Laws must allow for a certain degree of flexibility,² but compared to what fictitious robots require, human morals have to be far more complex, have to be far less well defined and more flexible, and, and this is the major difference, they have to be custom made. External influences try to shape our sets of morals, for the benefit of society as a whole, or for the benefit of those in power, but ultimately everybody develops their own set of morals, to suit their own particular needs — complex needs that reflect economic, emotional, physical, social, political, sexual etc. aspects of a person's situation and constitution.

Please note that morals do not necessarily conform to our (yours, mine, or the prevailing) ideas of morality. Their purpose is for the person, not for society — they serve society only indirectly, by enabling a person to exist within their society's framework, which, again, is in that person's interest.

Also, a person's morals can be bent and can be broken. They can have loopholes, they can change over time, they can be temporarily disabled, they can adapt, even swiftly, to changed situations, and they will often involve “as-long-as-I-get-away-with-it” aspects. These are features, not flaws. Morals do not work for the human mind the same way that Asimov's laws work for Asimovian robots or brakes work for cars. Only their *purpose* is the same — to keep the system stable. The morals themselves can vary widely, between societies, between individuals, and over time, but humans have developed the mental mechanism of morals because they *needed* to.

Like everything in the human body and mind, morals can be dysfunctional. They can be hypertrophic, hypotrophic, maladjusted, or in other ways fall short of properly fulfilling their purpose. The person can suffer from this dysfunctionality, or other persons can, or society as a whole. But the point in understanding the purpose of morals is to understand that there is

² What if a robot came upon a madman about to set fire to a house with people in it. He would stop the madman, wouldn't he? [...] He would do his best not to kill him. If the madman died, the robot would require psychotherapy because he might easily go mad at the conflict presented to him — of having broken Rule One to adhere to Rule One in a higher sense. But a man would be dead and a robot would have killed him. (Isaac Asimov, *Evidence*, 1946)

no point in dealing moralistically with dysfunctional ones, any more than there is a purpose in dealing moralistically with other human deficiencies, alleged deficiencies, or deviations from social norms.

This does not make considerations obsolete of how to behave ethically, or what ethic rules to obey and guidelines to follow — just the contrary. Our thoughts are free. Our feelings are what they are. But for our actions, and for our inactions, we are responsible. To understand that our morals do not whisper or shout eternal metaphysical truths to us but serve a purpose can help us put them into perspective. Morals do not relieve us of the obligation to *think* about a situation, to consider our options, and to *decide*.

THE MORALITY OF AMORALITY

I am an amoralist, the same way that I am an atheist, and for the same reasons. Both morality and religion (which can overlap, but can also exist without each other) are based upon deception and false promises, and are driven by hidden agendas.

Both the preachers of faith and the preachers of morality serve their masters and their own interests, with no regard for truth or for the needs and interests of others.

Neither morality nor religion have ever been effective in protecting the weak, the innocent, the persecuted, the abused, nor have they ever prevented violence, oppression or injustice. And this is not due to their, or our own, shortcomings or imperfections — this lies in their very nature. Both, morality and religion, do more harm than good, by far, and have always done so.

And then there is human law, which, too, claims to define right and wrong. It cannot be said that the law, as such, necessarily does more harm than good, but that it often harms is beyond question.

Definitions:

Religion is the obligation to believe in the reality of a bizarre fiction, to obey the commands of non-existent supernatural entities, and to strive to please them and their self-appointed representatives and apologists.

Morality is the obligation to think or not to think, to do or not to do, to feel or not to feel something, because, well, you shouldn't. (God, nature, or customs may be called to testify as authorities.)

Law, of course, is codified power.

Excursus:

There are four sides to the law (which to some degree blur into each other):

- it provides rules by which a complex society can operate
- it protects the weak
- it protects the rich and the powerful, allows them to enjoy their privileges, and upholds the structures that allow the powerful to stay in power, and the rich to further increase their wealth
- it enforces select religious and moralistic agendas, in accordance with the interests of the rich and the powerful.

The relative strengths of these four sides vary greatly, between societies and over time, but we haven't yet seen one of them to be absent.

But this is not about law. This is about morality.

Rejecting religion helps to tell true from false.

Rejecting morality helps to tell right from wrong. I am an amoralist for ethical reasons.

When has “Thou shalt not kill” ever stayed the hand of an executioner, or kept a war from being waged? But only by the millions can those be counted who have been killed, or whose lives have been destroyed, in the names of religion or morality.

Side note:

For the sake of those who feel unduly inconvenienced by the commandment not to kill, it has recently been rephrased by some as “Thou shalt not murder,” which they say is what God had meant to say in the first place. About this, see my essay *Thou Shalt Not Kill*.

Talking politics:

Everyone should be able to live in peace, freedom, safety, and reasonable comfort. (This, obviously, would include universal health care and universal basic income.) If morality could get us there, or at least get us closer, I’d be a moralist.

The things that people lack to live a good life, or even just to live, will not be granted to them on moral grounds by those who, materially or emotionally, profit from other people’s lacks. Moral considerations will not make the privileged give up their privileges, no matter how small or out of proportions these privileges are.

At its best, morality makes people give alms to the poor. At its worst, it serves to explain why the poor deserve to be poor (due to their own lack of virtues), why the serfs deserve to be serfs (due to their own nature), and why the oppressed deserve to be oppressed (for their own good). Do not count on morality when you hope to see poverty, servitude and oppression abolished.

If you do not let your thoughts, feelings and acts be guided by the demands of religion and morality, what, then, may keep you from ruthlessly and selfishly pursuing your own advantage, at the cost of others? The others. The contracts, spoken or unspoken, that you make with them. And your own selfish interest to get along with them, and to be able to hope for their support, when you need it.

And, of course — when and where you feel them — your own sense of justice, sense of responsibility, kindness, compassion, love, and desire to contribute to other people’s safety and happiness.

And when you do not feel them, you can still try to act decently towards people, animals, and the planet.

Religion and morality, though, are tools for the select few to draw on the support of others — to

exploit them economically, politically, emotionally, sexually — through real and imaginary threats, and through offers of imaginary rewards.

Trying to force your own morality upon others, for moral reasons, is an unjustifiable act of aggression.

Defend your interests. Stand by your values and convictions. Live them. Fight for them, preach them, if you are so inclined — I do it, too — but appeal to reason, and do not claim that you have nature, a deity, or some universal moral truth on your side. And yes, I may still judge you if you do what I deem to be wrong. Or I may not.

More often than not, it are the innocent who feel guilty, while the guilty, as long as they profit from their acts, feel justified, victorious and smug.

When you say you are a good person, I am wary of you.

Who is a good person? Someone who always acts how you think they should act. Which, quite often, will not be how someone else thinks they should act.

Striving to be a good person will come at other people's expense. Ultimately, it will be self-contradictory. Claiming to be a good person is claiming to have chased down a phantom.

Those who say "I am not a good person" are those whom I fear the least.

We have fought for the right of our thoughts to be free — the recognition that thought crimes are not crimes, that the thought police has no mandate to enter our minds.

Morality, though, still — if not increasingly — feels entitled to tell us what we have, and what we have not, to feel.

You feel what you feel. Right or wrong do not apply. The feel police has no legitimate mandate, either.

Your feelings, and your thoughts, are your own. Do not impose them upon others, though. Do not even impose them upon yourself.

If you never have thoughts or feelings that contradict each other, you may as well never have any at all.

Also, being interested in something, being fascinated with it, being sexually aroused by it, neither constitutes nor necessitates approval.

But you are still looking for a rule which you can use for guidance?

The search will inevitably lead you to Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative — no better answer has been found, or, probably, can be found:

"Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time wish it to become a universal law."

Which maxims can possibly meet this condition? It's an equation that needs to be solved.
(And no, "I do what I want, and everybody else should do what I want" is not a valid solution.
"Universal" means that your maxim can be everybody else's, from their own points of view.)

A universal law cannot be asymmetric.

A universal law cannot include arbitrary terms.

And a universal law cannot include moral terms.

When you introduce a moral term, the equation becomes unsolvable.

Any moral term will necessarily imply a recourse to a moral authority, outside of the universal law — it will then necessarily always be *someone's* universal law, and thus not universal.

One person's virtue will be some other person's sin. One person's sinner will be another person's saint. One person's guilt will be another person's pride. And vice versa, of course.

To solve the ultimate moral puzzle, you have to let go of morality.

And I claim that these two sentences together, and they alone, meet the categorical imperative's condition, and constitute a universal moral law that serves its purpose, being free from morality.

The purpose being to protect, as far as possible, the planet from humans, and humans from each other and from themselves, without, in the process, to cause more harm than good.

I could write many pages about this, I could write a whole book, but in the end, you will either accept this as the one universal law, or you will not:

– *Take what you need, and leave the rest.*

– *Never betray a friend.*

And yes, I could elaborate on both of these sentences, and on why they are essential, but instead I let you figure it out for yourselves.

P.S.:

My thanks to (among a great many others): William Blake (*The Marriage of Heaven and Earth*), Max Stirner (*Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*), Mary Kingsley (*Travels in West Africa*), Lao Tzu (*Tao Te Ching*), and Camille Paglia (*Sexual Personae*).

THOU SHALT NOT KILL

(I've mentioned "Thou shalt not kill" in my essay *The Morality of Amoral*ity. This is my reply to the objection that the Biblical commandment should correctly be translated as "Thou shalt not murder," giving it an entirely different meaning.)

For many centuries, "Thou shalt not kill" has been one of the undisputed divine commandments, and even among those who do not believe in the deity that allegedly has issued them, it has had a reputation of being a cornerstone of human civilization.

Being undisputed as a commandment does not mean that it is always heeded, but "Thou shalt not kill" is a very powerful statement. And, it is one that stands out from the other nine of the often hailed Ten Commandments.

Let's omit the ones in which the deity declares that, and how, it demands to be worshipped — this leaves six, which are a rather mixed bag of dos and don'ts.

- Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.
- Thou shalt not kill.
- Thou shalt not commit adultery.
- Thou shalt not steal.
- Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.
- Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

If these commandments are meant to serve as rules for a peaceful and just society they seem a bit arbitrary, there are notable omissions, and, for instance, it isn't clear whether and how far the reference to "neighbours" in the final two commandments is meant to restrict their scope. But, this doesn't need to concern us here.

"Thou shalt not kill", this stands out from among the other commandments, by the sheer power of its words.

Recently, though, the word *kill* has begun to be disputed, by those who feel it interferes too much with killings they deem necessary — should there be no executions, for instance, and no wars? These are restrictions not everyone wants to accept. No God-given right to kill your, or your God's, enemies?

For those who want to be justified in taking lives when they deem it necessary or appropriate,

who want to go to war or send others to war, without violating God's commandments, there is now a way out. Since the second half of the 20th century, an increasing number of theologians and bible scholars have been telling us, increasingly getting listened to, that killing is not forbidden after all — that, correctly translated from ancient Hebrew, the commandment says, “Thou shalt not murder.” (If you are interested in their arguments, search the Internet for *thou shalt not kill murder*, you will find ample.)

“Thou shalt not murder,” instead of “Thou shalt not kill.” How much more convenient this is, except for those who need their lives to be protected. But what a paltry commandment it is. Seriously, who needs to be told not to *murder*? What does this God think of the creatures he has created in his likeness, that it is necessary to tell them *this*? What challenge to human morality and spirituality does this pose — do humans really need to have laid the threshold of acceptable behavior so low?

“Thou shalt not murder” — murder, we are told, is the “unlawful killing” of another human being. Unlawful. Against the law. But, which law? The law that, depending on when and where you are, allows, for instance, the killing of slaves, heretics, infidels, apostates, blasphemers, witches, horse thieves, traitors, rebels, deserters, adulterers, homosexuals, indigenes, enemy soldiers, and, as long as they are collateral damage, the inhabitants of enemy territories? And when the law allows it, or even demands it, no commandment admonishes or encourages you to refrain from killing? And when you are among the ones who write the law, or have it written in their favor, you can put into it the permission to kill anyone whose death will profit you, and “Thou shalt not murder” will give you your God's blessings?

This is it? This is supposed to be the divine commandment? Nothing more than what any lawyer could tell you?

That “murder” may be a more correct translation of the ancient Hebrew word in the Torah than “kill,” may be the case. It is also true that in the “Old Testament” God himself orders his followers to kill their enemies, and himself repeatedly kills those who displease him. But how relevant is that for us, when we can chose between not to murder and not to kill?

The two most authoritative versions of the Bible in English and in German, for many centuries, have said “Thou shalt not kill” (the King James version), and “Du sollst nicht töten” (Martin Luther). This has been the teaching, this has been how it was understood. In *theory*, that is — it never worked in practice, and was never intended to work in practice, but it is the theory, the vision, the ideal, what we are talking about here. The ideal that commands our attention.

“Thou shalt not kill” urges us to think further, far beyond where “Thou shalt not murder” could take us.

“There are many ways to kill. You can drive a knife into someone's guts, deprive them of bread, not cure them of a disease, put them in miserable accommodations, work them to death, drive

them to suicide, lead them to war, etc. Only few of these things are forbidden in our state.” (Bert Brecht — “Es gibt viele Arten zu töten. Man kann einem ein Messer in den Bauch stechen, einem das Brot entziehen, einen von einer Krankheit nicht heilen, einen in eine schlechte Wohnung stecken, einen durch Arbeit zu Tode schinden, einen zum Suizid treiben, einen in den Krieg führen usw. Nur wenig davon ist in unserem Staat verboten.”) This list could easily be made much longer.

“Thou shalt not kill” — taken seriously, this also means Thou shalt not, through your actions or inactions, intentionally or through negligence, let others lose their lives. Or, going one obvious step further, not let others come to harm. (Yes, I’m paraphrasing Asimov’s first “Robot Law.”) In some parts of the world the law allows you to watch someone die, when you could easily save them. Where I live, that’s a crime for which you could go to jail. It’s not murder, though. “Thou shalt not murder” does not apply. Is that what you want?

There are parts of the world where, when you are ill, you do not get the medical treatment that you need, but only that which you can afford. There are places where, when you cannot afford the basic necessities of life, you die from lack of them. Charity may occasionally bring relief, but when “Thou shalt not kill” is taken seriously to mean “do not let others lose their lives,” universal health care and universal basic income are the logical and necessary consequences. Nothing, though, follows from “Thou shalt not murder.”

And finally, “Thou shalt not kill” — do not take a life, do not cause death, do not allow death to happen when you can prevent it — does not explicitly refer to humans, it admonishes you not to kill animals either. Not wantonly, at least, not more than cannot be avoided.

Excursus:

There is one religion, and only one, that sets the value of life absolute, forbids all violence, and forbids to kill any living being — that is Jainism. Plants are excluded, but any other living beings, no matter how small, are not. For pious Jains, agriculture is not permissible — you cannot plow a field, you cannot harvest the crop, without killing earthworms and insects — but also profiting from such acts, eating the food for which living beings were killed, would make you an accomplice. And, going one step further, already two and a half thousand years ago Jainism postulated the existence of living beings that are ubiquitous but too small to be seen — we are now able to see them through our microscopes, and know that they actually exist. And, Jainism explicitly states that these must not be killed either. In practice, of course, Jains compromise, by eating a vegetarian or vegan diet, but there are those, even today, who take the need to protect all life so seriously — you cannot eat without killing *something* — that they starve to death. Which, of course, leads to a tragic paradox — they kill themselves, not to mention all the microbes that live inside their bodies.

It has been suggested that Christian teaching, which draws from many sources, has been influenced by Jainism. Turning the other cheek, not throwing the first stone, not taking the

sword, forgiving those who are indebted to us — those ideas, indeed, seem closer to Jainism than to any other ancient philosophy or religion. A connection, even a direct one, is possible, but, to my knowledge, has so far not been established.

The “Old Testament,” of course, speaks a very different language — again and again the God it describes kills, and urges his followers to kill. It might be said that “Thou shalt not kill” and “Thou shalt not murder” represent two different traditions which Christian doctrine has never succeeded to properly align, but I am not really interested here in theological arguments. For all the non-violent parts of their teachings, Christian churches of all denominations have not hesitated to burn witches and heretics, and not hesitated to call for holy wars.

“Thou shalt not kill” is a commandment that, when taken literally, cannot possibly be obeyed. And as a moral rule, it has never worked, easily pushed aside by material and emotional interests, greed, fear and hate in all their many all too human forms and guises. But, “Thou shalt not murder” — what a sterile maxim this is in comparison. The great majority will obey it without effort — but this commandment opens no vistas, it provokes no contradictions — at best, it allows for legal arguments about the definition of murder. What merits can be won by obeying it? “Thou shalt not kill,” on the other hand, this needs our response — how do we relate to it?

Can we feel the desire, the urge to kill? For someone to be killed? Yes, we can, it’s how the human mind works. Can killing be necessary? unavoidable? acceptable? Yes, it can be. Can we set up rules for when it is justified to kill? No, we can not. If we did, we’d only say “Thou shalt not murder” by some other words, and any such rule would necessarily reflect the values and serve the interests of those who make it, or choose to follow it.

Can we as humans, depending on circumstances, understand the act of killing, accept it, shrug it off, forgive it? Yes, we can. Can we even enjoy it? Yes, even that — though, as Abigail says in *The Journey*, enjoying something doesn’t make it right. Can “Thou shalt not kill” serve as an unbreakable rule? No — nothing can, and nothing should. Unbreakable rules, however well meant (and often they aren’t), tend to do more harm than good.

But imagine yourself standing on top of a mountain, ready to speak four words, in a voice that will echo around the globe and through the ages — four words by which you may be remembered, four words by which you may leave your mark on human history, four words that, as you see it, contain the essence of people’s responsibility for each other and for the planet — which words will that be? When you have already said “Thou shalt not” — which word would you speak next?

P.S.:

And now let’s listen to Eric Burdon’s song “Sky Pilot” —

www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0JMCaKwOUY

(“Sky pilot” is a term for a military chaplain.)

*In the morning they return with tears in their eyes
The stench of death drifts up to the skies
A young soldier so ill, looks at the sky pilot
Remembers the words "Thou shalt not kill"*

P.P.S.:

In my essay *The Morality of Amoral* I have stated that I neither believe in divine commandments nor in the virtues of morality. On what grounds, then, do I argue in favor of "Thou shalt not kill"? It follows from the principle, one of the two that seem irrefutable to me, "Take what you need, and leave the rest." Taking a life will almost always be taking more than is needed, whatever name the law applies to it. No need for religion, no need for morality — as a guideline, this is simply a basic necessity.

JACK-A-ROE, OR, TO SEE TEN THOUSAND FALL

This is just about an old song that keeps playing in my mind ... It dates back to the 18th century, and has become quite popular in the late 20th. It is best known under the title *Jackaroo* or *Jack-A-Roe*, Joan Baez has recorded it, so has Bob Dylan, so have the Grateful Dead, and many others.

The story is told sketchily, with large gaps in it. In a prose text, you wouldn't get away with this, but in a song, in poetry, the listener or reader can fill these gaps in.

It is about a girl, daughter of a "wealthy merchant," who has "sweethearts a-plenty" and "of high degree," but she only loves Jack the sailor. (Joan Baez's version leaves out the part where her father forbids her to see him). Anyway, he leaves — "Now Jackie's gone a-sailing with trouble on his mind, to leave his native country and his darling girl behind."

She decides to follow him — he has gone to fight in a war, and to be able to find him, she has to enlist, and for this she has to disguise herself as a man. Boarding a vessel she gives her name as Jack-A-Roe (in older versions, Jack Monroe), but her disguise is questioned: "Your waist is light and slender, your fingers are neat and small, Your cheeks too red and rosy to face the cannonball" — to which she replies, "I know my waist is slender, my fingers are neat and small, But it would not make me tremble to see ten thousand fall."

And she means it.

By the time she arrives the war is "soon over," and she goes looking for her beloved — "And among the dead and dying her darling boy she found." She picks him up in her arms, carries him to the town, calls for a physician to heal his wounds, he is healed, and they get married.

Here is Joan Baez's version:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=4lnJSW-OUyM

It is fascinating how this song pulverizes gender stereotypes — she risks her life to go looking for him, she carries him to safety in her arms, and this is told as something quite natural for her to do — but there are two more aspects of this song that I want to mention: First, that it would not make her tremble to see ten thousand fall — callous words not expected from a young girl in a love story — but if seeing thousands fall, or the prospect of seeing them fall, would have made her tremble, she would not have been able to do what she did, she would not have been able to save her lover. Not to tremble at that sight is an essential part of her strength.

And the other thing: it must have taken time to find her lover among the dead and dying. If she had not spent that time for her search, if in this search she had not walked past or stepped over the dying, she might not have saved this one, but she might have saved two, or five, or ten others?

But their dying does not make her tremble, nor does it distract her from her quest — she sacrifices them to the hope, to the slim chance, of finding her lover and saving him. But, could anyone possibly blame her for that? If we feel no empathy for strangers we are sociopaths, but how much empathy, depending on the situation, can be too much? Could we want anyone to put the lives of strangers (how many strangers?) above that of a single loved one? Would we want to live in a world where that would be expected from the girl in our song? From anyone? Can we ponder this question without it making us tremble?

This is not an argument for cynically accepting “collateral damages” of violent acts we deem necessary or justified, for our own benefit or for some greater good. It is about acknowledging that there are limits to what we can feel, and to what we can do, and that we cannot feel equally for everyone. And also, that we feel what we feel, not what we are told to feel. But whatever we feel, we still have to choose what we do.

RACES AND RACISM

I am not a historian, and I do not try to pretend to be one. And I'm not really saying anything here that hasn't been said before, and better — still, no matter how often and how well it has been said, sadly it needs to be said again. I'm painting a broad and admittedly Eurocentric picture here, not going into details, and not providing any evidence for my assertions. It's up to you to consider them, or not.

Ever since the dawn of history, we fought our opponents — our neighbors, our enemies, or someone whose territory we had just reached — because of the actual or perceived threat they posed to us, because they were in the way, or because we wanted what they had. And it was an obvious and unquestioned rule that when we had won the war, we were entitled to deal with the defeated in whichever way we thought was most beneficial to us. Kill them, rape them, rob them, drive them off, enslave them, torture them to death in private or in the arena, subjugate them, make them pay tributes, make them our allies, or incorporate them into our own society, with limited or with full rights. Which of those options we chose, or what combination of them, may have needed to be justified politically, but not morally. Or, if to some degree moral justification seemed advisable, we could rely on our god or gods to provide it.

It was our victory that entitled us, not something in the nature of the defeated, whatever we thought of them. When the Romans (for example) looked down upon barbarians, they looked down upon their culture (or, from the Roman point of view, lack thereof) — they did not look down upon the individual members of barbarian nations though, because of their perceived biology, or “race.” There existed privileges of birth, of course, but these were social, not biological. Romans often manumitted their slaves — these then had limited rights, but their children could become fully entitled Roman citizens. A tributary tribe was tributary because they had been defeated, a slave was a slave because he or she had been enslaved — this sufficed to constitute their condition. Slaves were not inferior to Romans by nature. Racism didn't exist, because there was no need for it. I have focused on Roman history here, but the principle holds across civilizations and through the ages.

And then came the late 18th century — the Age of Enlightenment, *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, human rights — “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” The principle that defeating someone in war gave the victor unquestioned ownership rights and power of disposition over the defeated became questionable, and ultimately unsustainable. The problem needed to be solved, and the solution was the invention of the concept of “races” — an invention that, like the steam engine and the electric generator, essentially shaped the 19th and 20th century, and still shapes our present.

Human “race” is a political construct that has no foundation in reality, which modern genetic science has finally proven beyond any doubt, but with little impact — it is just too useful to be given up simply because it isn’t true. Race was invented when the need arose to justify colonialism and slavery, to justify the oppression and exploitation of other human beings — these could now be based on the inherent moral and intellectual inferiority which all members of morally and intellectually inferior races necessarily shared. The unquestionable inferiority of the “lower” or “primitive” races, expressed in scientific and moralistic terms, justified patronizing as well as violently aggressive attitudes and acts towards them, with the distinction between patronizing and violently aggressive always being blurred. The victors now ruled not simply because they had won the wars, but because their moral and intellectual superiority entitled them to rule, even for the benefit of the ruled. Their victories were just the logical consequences and obvious proofs of their natural superiority.

Of course, ruling elites had always liked to see themselves as being distinct from their subjects by birth — think of the “blue blood” of European aristocrats — but their dynasties came and went, and when they came, they often enough came from humble origins. The blue blood was never anything else but metaphorical, no actual biological difference was seriously implied. This changed with the invention of races, and though this invention in the late 18th century preceded the theory of evolution, that theory came in handy for putting “races” on a seemingly scientific foundation. When homo sapiens had “descended from apes” (or, correctly, descended from common ancestors), then different “races” could be described as having progressed further along this path than others. Differences between higher and lower, advanced and primitive races could now be discussed in biological and scientific terms — closer to, or farther removed, from their simian progenitors. Darwin himself was no stranger to this line of thought.

The culmination of this concept was the invention of the “white race.” Detached from any observable physical traits, to a large degree even from the color of skin, “white” never meant anything else but “we” — we with our guns, our ships, our laws, and our feelings of entitlement. But, and this is important, the privileges of birth/ancestry/blood, and the entitlement, had now been democratized. Those who had been the subjects of their own ruling elites were now given a share in the benefits of being masters, by virtue of belonging to the master race. Or at least they were given the illusion of having a share — how much of it being real, and how much of it being bogus, of course depending on their proximity to their own masters.

To sum it up, racism is not a relic that has come down to us from distant and less enlightened ages, but is actually the child of the modern age of enlightenment. Race is a racist invention. Races do not exist, but racism does. (And, by the way, in some ways gender could be seen as a form of race, but here is not the place to discuss this further.)

Ethnicity isn’t race. Nationality isn’t race. Color of skin isn’t race. Nothing is race, because races do not exist. Races are made up. And when you look more closely you see that actual biological

traits, however irrelevant they would be, have not even been used to define races in any consistent ways — these were always defined according to specific political needs. Races are made up for a purpose — inequality. While large-scale inequalities obviously date back to long before races were invented, races are essentially useful in deepening, perpetuating and justifying inequality, and, of course, in helping to utilize it — for what’s the point of being superior, after all, when you cannot reap economic or emotional profit from it? And “inequality,” for this purpose, covers everything from discrimination and exploitation to slavery and genocide.

There are many lines along which “the others” can be dehumanized — religion, nationality, politics, social status, lifestyle, sexuality — but “race” is the most powerful one, because of the fake biological arguments that it comes armed with. But still, the fact that races are made up does not prevent them from being relevant — of course those to whom membership of a certain race is ascribed share common experiences, and can form, or can be forced to form, a distinct social group. Their ascribed “race” can become a tool of their own emancipation, when it forms the basis for solidarity, based on common experiences, interests, and aspects of culture — therefore, denying the social reality of race can be an instrument of oppression, and in itself be racist. Even so, we need to be clear about the fact that there is no biological reality in which human “races” exist.

P.S.:

If you are interested in the topic of race, colonialism and genocide, I strongly recommend the short, powerful and excellently written book by Sven Lindqvist, *Exterminate All The Brutes*. Really, get and read it. I am grateful to K2 for having told me about that book after having seen a first draft of this essay.

RAPE, TORTURE, MURDER, GENOCIDE

October 2023 ... I started writing this essay some time ago, but didn't finish it, because I thought that it painted a too bleak picture of human nature — if slowly, and with setbacks, humans learned, and things were getting better, weren't they? Then came the murderous Russian assault on Ukraine, the civil war in Sudan, the ethnic violence in Manipur, the massacres in Israel — I could list more, just watch the news. Violence is everywhere, and genocide is never far away. So, here it is. And at the time you are reading this, maybe a long time after I have written it, the above may be old news, but I am afraid your more recent news will have similar stories of atrocities and acts of violence to tell.

Here are some thoughts on acts of rape, torture, killing and looting, in the context of what is usually called “hate crimes,” acts of violence that do not grow out of personal relationships between perpetrators and victims.

What we are not discussing here are personal acts of violence triggered by anger, resulting from despair, or purely motivated by greed.

We have to exclude war itself here (even though it is not such a different topic), but not acts of rape, torture, killing and looting that happen in wars, as part of these wars, or in their aftermaths.

We are talking about acts of violence where the line is crossed from utter disregard of other people's suffering to revelling in it.

This text just outlines my thoughts, it does not attempt to argue or to prove them.

Reality isn't neatly ordered, so, the subject of this text cannot be defined exactly, and I do not claim that all which is said here always applies.

You are invited to do your own research, think your own thoughts, find your own examples, and come to your own conclusions, which may or may not agree with mine.

I thank K2 for their thoughts and for their help with clarifying and expressing mine.

Acts of rape, torture, killing and looting, alone, in groups or in masses, can give an intense emotional and sexual high.

Most people have the potential to experience it, and, under the “right” circumstances, may act on their latent desire.

“Potential” means that humans are, overcoming various levels of restraint, capable to rape, torture, kill and loot, or to tolerate, applaud or support such acts, or willingly benefit from them. (If for “rape” you read “sexually connoted violence,” then the potential exists independent of gender.)

Five elements, interacting in various ways, constitute the “right” circumstances, or conditions:

- Opportunity
- Incentive
- Justification
- Impunity
- Encouragement

Conditions

Opportunity:

“Opportunity” is a complex matter, which includes objective, subjective and psychological aspects. What constitutes an “opportunity” will vary between people.

Only a small number of people with severe personality disorders will actively seek, or actively create, opportunities to indulge in RTKL acts.

Only a small number of people will be in conscious expectation of such an opportunity to present itself.

The majority will be surprised, and unprepared, when an opportunity occurs. Propaganda can make them prepared and ready to take it, though.

What may not appear or appeal as an opportunity to someone at first, may finally do so if a situation that favors RTKL acts continues.

Incentive:

The emotional high of committing acts of violence, an exhilarating sense of power, pleasure found in causing destruction, pain and humiliation, an elevated self-esteem, and sexual gratification through rape are strong incentives, but prospects of more tangible gains play a major role, too.

The term “looting” is here meant to include all kinds of short- and long-term advantages achieved through robbing the victims, subjugating or enslaving them, displacing them, or eliminating them.

Next to economic advantages, gains in reputation, social status and political power can be strong incentives. In some cases, incentives can also be spiritual — moral righteousness, glory, and/or the expectation of reward in the afterlife.

Those who organize RTKL acts can use implicit or explicit promises of material gains to recruit and motivate perpetrators, but aim at far more substantial gains in wealth and power for themselves.

Justification:

Fabricated stories serve to align the perpetrators’ (or would-be perpetrators’) self-images and

their ethical, moral, or religious convictions with RTKL acts they intend to commit, are committing, or have committed.

These stories usually involve perceived provocation or perceived threat — victims deserve what happens to them and/or bring it about themselves.

Without compromising the perpetrators' positive self-images, justification stories make all the violence seem excusable, or even necessary and unavoidable.

In the case of genocide, victims may need to be exterminated because they are disgusting (vile, sub-human, vermin), or because they pose a terminal threat (it's "them" or "us"), or both.

The demands upon credibility or logical consistency of justification stories are very low. They are easily believed when people want to believe them, because an opportunity to engage in RTKL acts beckons.

Justification stories can be provided by organizers of RTKL acts, or they can be invented by the perpetrators themselves, following patterns that are well enough known to them.

Impunity:

The freedom from the fear of repercussions is an essential part of "opportunity."

Repercussions can be physical, legal or social. (It is the purpose of justification stories to avert emotional repercussions, that is, guilt.)

Fearing or not fearing repercussions depends on their perceived likelihood, and their perceived personal relevance.

Risk assessment will vary greatly between people, but will to some degree depend on the perceived behavior of others.

Indulging in RTKL acts as part of a group will greatly lower the actual and/or perceived risks, the more so the larger the group is.

Expressed or implied support by legal and/or political authorities or even specific orders, will, of course, be a major factor.

With a good enough justification story, self-sacrifice can serve as a special form of impunity, eliminating all considerations of risk.

Encouragement:

Facing an opportunity to indulge in RTKL acts, most people will still hesitate to trust in external (impunity) and internal (justification) permissions.

Encouragement helps to overcome that hesitation. Encouragement can excuse, permit, advocate, request or actually demand RTKL acts.

Encouragement can be atmospheric, it can come from political, religious or other authorities, and/or it can be peer group pressure in a specific situation.

In tightly knit groups once RTKL acts have been committed by some (which may help them reinforce or claim leadership status), hesitant members will be under pressure to join in, reluctance becoming disloyalty. Lines get crossed, guidelines shift, RTKL acts become part of the norm, and group members learn to take part, enjoy, and benefit from them.

It may seem that a lot of conditions have to be met to actually let RTKL acts happen, but don't forget:

- in most people the potential, the latent desire, is already there
- all the conditions mentioned can be created
- not all of the conditions need to be equally met
- there will always be people whose thresholds regarding some of the conditions will be low.

Also, once RTKL acts happen on a large enough scale, the process of normalization sets in. Normalization then reinforces impunity, justification and encouragement, so that these conditions will become self-perpetuating.

People differ, of course. What is an incentive to many may not be an incentive to some, and even more so this applies to justifications.

Trust in impunity, or the willingness to take risks, will vary between people, as will their susceptibility to propaganda and encouragement.

Not everyone will engage or participate in acts of violence when they can, are encouraged to do it, or will profit from them. But enough will.

Rape, Murder, Genocide

(Instead of genocide, eliminationism would be the more correct term, but let's stay with genocide here.)

RTKL acts — rape, torture, murder and looting — can happen individually as criminal acts, they can happen on a limited scale though usually in a wider context (witch hunts, lynchings, gang wars, pogroms etc.), they happen in the context of war where thresholds are lowered through fear and a general disregard for life (there are no wars in which men, women and children are not raped, tortured and murdered), or they can aim at genocide.

For individual acts of rape opportunity often suffices. Individual acts that go beyond rape are usually committed by perpetrators with sociopathic tendencies, who seek or actively create opportunities, who feel little if any need for justification beyond their own desires, and who underestimate or disregard risks of repercussions. These people will not need encouragement, though it may be given from their peer groups. The more widely RTKL acts are encouraged, and the more people already participate in them or show willingness to participate, the more "normal" the majority of perpetrators will be. Incentives play a role, justification is easily accepted, and impunity is assumed. Ultimately opportunity becomes irrelevant, because in the context of genocide it presents itself everywhere.

Rape exemplarily shows the importance of potential and of latent desire. Given opportunity, with incentive being found in the act itself, the thresholds for justification, impunity and encouragement are low. As innumerable parents have found, when they offer their daughters (or sometimes sons) to friends, acquaintances and strangers, the risk is very low that their offer will be rejected and that authorities will be informed. From party rape to abuse of power to sexual slavery, justification is easily fabricated (she wanted it, she provoked me, she didn't resist etc.), impunity is expected, and encouragement, if any is needed, is quickly found.

With a little more encouragement, and some reassurance about impunity, when the opportunity is offered, rape can be extended to torture and even killing. Justification will not be as easily constructed, but, if all the other conditions are met, little of it will be needed — some contempt will do, and this contempt will easily grow out of the situation. Again, the potential is there — not only in men, also in women. And so is the latent desire — latent, because few people go through life waiting for an opportunity to rape, torture and kill, but if the opportunity offers itself, the desire can become manifest.

Many RTKL acts (rapes, witch-hunts, lynchings, pogroms etc.) are committed by groups — the creation of opportunity, mutual encouragement and the promise of impunity let people commit these acts as parts of a group, when they would not do them on their own.

Genocide combines all the “right circumstances” in a perfect way — opportunity, incentive, justification, impunity and encouragement.

RTKL acts often break out along ethnic fault lines, where the idea of being threatened by members of the other ethnic group provides powerful justification stories.

Ethnic fault lines can be substituted by religious or social ones, or they can be entirely fictitious and created for the purpose of supporting justification stories.

Hate

Justification stories drum up high levels of negative emotions — fear, contempt, anger, hate.

To a certain level these emotions pre-exist, but the justification stories amplify them to the point where their intensity supports the validity of the stories and makes action seem unavoidable.

Fear is the one emotion that may, at least in theory, be addressable by rational arguments. Hate, on the other hand, is entirely beyond the reach of arguments and reason.

Hate is an important factor because hate lets people commit acts of violence that they otherwise wouldn't — and also adds to their violence — but hate alone doesn't start genocide.

And the absence of hate doesn't prevent genocide, because when opportunity, incentive, justification, impunity and encouragement beckon, hate will come.

Hate serves a purpose — for those who organize RTKL acts it motivates their followers, and for the perpetrators it lets them overcome compunction, doubts and restraint.

There was antisemitism long before the holocaust, but Germans had had Jewish neighbors,

friends, doctors, lawyers, shop-owners, teachers, lovers etc., and had not felt the compulsion to kill them.

Nazi propaganda provided justification stories and instigated hate, but it would not have sufficed to make the genocide happen. Opportunity, incentive, impunity and encouragement did it.

So ...

There isn't a political, economic or philosophical (spiritual, religious) system in all of history that hasn't been blamed for fostering RTKL violence.

There isn't one that hasn't been suggested or promoted as a remedy.

None of them have really worked. We keep hearing "Never again" over and over again.

Clearly, to prevent RTKL acts from rape to genocide, the five elements that together constitute the "right circumstances" have to be addressed.

But, while that needs to be done, addressing these elements will not prevent RTKL acts from happening, because, ultimately they are not the driving force behind those acts.

Ultimately, humans being what they are, their potential for violence, their latent desire for the emotional and sexual high, are the driving force.

And all attempts to create "better" humans inevitably have led, and necessarily will lead, into totalitarian nightmares.

Moral appeals have no effect, because perpetrators have justification stories available that put them on the right side of morality.

Our ignorance or denial of our own potential and our own latent desire for RTKL violence makes us susceptible to justification stories, to explain to ourselves our own violent impulses.

Desires can be controlled — most people have learned how to do it, and do it all the time. It is a basic human ability, without which human civilization would not be possible. The aura of righteousness, though, which justification stories bestow on our predatory impulses, makes them immune against self-control.

Acknowledging our own propensity for violence, the pleasure we may derive from other people's suffering, may relieve us from our need for justification stories.

And without these justifications, without the conviction that we are *right* in committing and profiting from atrocious acts of violence, we may be more open to reason, ethics and self-control.

Admittedly, this is a vague hope at best, but I don't have a better one.

This is what my writings are about.

This is real, this is not from a movie

On the following pages, you will see some photos that show violence. Be outraged when you look at them, be secretly fascinated, or be thrilled, but understand the principle: potential and desire meet opportunity and encouragement.

You may also want to look at my picture essay *The Allure of Agony* (PDF file, 18 MB) — you'll find historical works of art there, though, not photographs.

But if you want photos, here are some.



This photo is from the Algerian War, 1954 to 1962. I do not know by whom it was taken, or when, or where, nor do I know the names of the men, nor that of the woman, nor do I know whether she survived her encounter with the soldiers. *“And then everyone did with her what he wanted — no matter, how many men there were. When the men are in a good mood, they let the girl go, if not, then they kill her”* — a soldier named Ed Treratola told us this, about soldiers in a different war, in a different country, Vietnam. But change the men's clothes and weapons, change their faces and their names, and this can be any war, at any time in history, in any place. (Men get raped, tortured, mutilated and killed, too, of course. And women can be perpetrators. It's not primarily a question of gender, but of power.)

This is real, this is not from a movie.



A witch is tortured in a village of Papua New Guinea, in 2013. Due to the rain that dampened the enthusiasm of the villagers and extinguished the fire, she survived, badly injured — most others in her situation did, and still do, not. The onlookers' faces are grim — they do what is necessary to protect their village from witchcraft, and for this purpose they resolutely thwart any half-hearted attempts by the authorities to intervene.

Throughout history public executions have always drawn crowds, the more so the more elaborate and cruel they were, and they have always appealed to both (or all) genders. There are female spectators here, too, but as other photos of this scene clearly show, the front view places are all taken by men.

On 24th November 2007 the “All Adivasi Students’ Association Assam” staged a demonstration for the rights of ethnic minorities in the Assam metropolis of Guwahati.



They were not welcome. The photos show L. O., 17 at that time. Neither passersby nor police did intervene when she was stripped, kicked, beaten and chased through the streets at the center of Guwahati. None of those who stripped, kicked, beat and chased her, none of those who

watched, who laughed at her and took photos and videos, had expected this to happen when they had gotten up in the morning. But when the opportunity offered itself, wouldn't it have been a shame to let it go to waste? To not have looked, to not have run along, to not have taken all those photographs?

“People were laughing when these boys chased and beat me around the streets of Guwahati. I was naked and begging for help, but no one came to my rescue,” she later told in an interview. “Seeing me running around naked, a man took off his shirt and gamcha and gave it to me. He asked me to flee. The boys fought with him and asked him why he was helping me? They assaulted him as well. Meanwhile, I managed to flee the place.” So, yes, there was one who intervened. It can be done, though it can come at a price.

Opportunity, and impunity — none of the perpetrators feared legal consequences, and none of them had to suffer any. L. O. was not defeated, though — she took years to recover, but has become a proud political activist for women's and Adivasi minority rights.

The pogrom in Lviv in 1941 was organized by the German occupiers, and carried out by the local population (the numbers are disputed, but several thousand were killed).



The Germans had “propaganda troops” in place to document the pogrom, wanting photos and films that show people spontaneously rising up in a just rebellion against “the Jews,” but had to realize that the material they got wasn’t suitable for their propaganda purposes.

The perpetrators, once let loose, but also the photographers, pursued their own agendas, and the photos show what those were.

And when you do an Internet image search today, you will find this photo (and others of its kind) on porn sites — “*Nude Jewish Women Holocaust / Free Hot Nude Porn Pic Gallery*”, “*World War 2 Females Naked / Free Download Nude Photo Gallery*” or “*World war 2 porn Album — Top adult videos and photos.*” The Nazis’ genocidal reign of terror has ended with their military defeat, but the erotic appeal of their genocide images has survived.

Staff of the Auschwitz concentration camp enjoying a holiday at the nearby Solahütte resort, on July 22, 1944.



More than one million people were murdered at Auschwitz. The photo is from a photo album that belonged to Karl Höcker. In 1943 Höcker had been adjutant to the commandant at the Majdanek extermination camp, and in 1944 was transferred to Auschwitz to become adjutant to commandant Richard Baer. Höcker took the pictures as personal keepsakes.

The men were happy to have assignments that kept them safely away from the frontline. The women were either happy to have secured comfortable and decently paid office jobs, or they were happy that they could participate in mass murder — we do not know, but “There is much to suggest that they were involved in the killing — after all, trips to the Solahütte were a popular reward for ‘good work’ in the death camp.” (www.welt.de/kultur/article1199238/Die-entspannte-Freizeit-der-Massenmoerder.html, September 20, 2007.)

There were female guards of all ranks — about 10% of the guards were female, some 200 at Auschwitz. Maria Mandl, for instance, who was executed in 1948 for having been directly complicit in the deaths of over half a million prisoners. Auschwitz survivor Sala Feder told in her testimonial at Mandl’s trial, “During these selections, defendant Mandl tortured the prisoners in a cruel way, beating the women, the men and the children with a whip and kicking them blindly. She would tear the children from the arms of their mothers, and when the mothers tried to come near the children and defend them, Mandl would beat the mothers horribly and kick them. (...) Mandl selected several thousand women, and all of them — naked — were crammed into one block no. 25, where they stayed for seven days and nights without food or water. On the night of 27 September [1943], they were transported to the crematorium. For the period of these seven

days, we heard horrible screams and groans issuing from that block, and when the women were taken to the crematorium, the block elder, a Slovakian woman named Cyla told us that after those seven days there were more corpses than living people in that block, and that almost all of them had bitten fingers and breasts and plucked out eyes. During these seven days, if any prisoner wanted to carry water or some food to that block, she was arrested there and perished along with the rest. The above-described selection was carried by the defendant Mandl in person, with the help from kapos: Stenia, Leo and Maria, all of them cruel and used to torturing the prisoners in a horrible manner.”

Or Margot Drechsel, or Irma Grese, or Therese Brandl, all who assisted Dr. Mengele, selecting women to be sent to their deaths. (“Selections happened the following way: First, naked women scuffled in front of Mengele with arms raised; and then in front of Greze and Drechsler. Mengele did the first selections, while the women might select also people who Mengele left unselected.”) “Grese would intentionally choose the most beautiful women first when it came to selecting victims for the gas chambers,” told Auschwitz survivor Olga Lengyel. “She beat and tortured the prisoners and tormented many of them to death. Once, I saw that a young political prisoner, Jasia from Kraków, who was one second late to the roll call, was beaten and kicked to death by Brandl. There were dozens of incidents of this kind.” (Sala Feder). “Grese would often hit women on the breasts, something she especially enjoyed doing, as well as forcing young Jewish inmates to act as lookouts while she raped other prisoners” (Wendy Adele-Marie Sarti, *Women and Nazis*). Auschwitz survivor Dr. Gisella Perl said about Irma Grese, “She was one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen. Her body was perfect in every line, her face clear and angelic and her blue eyes the gayest, the most innocent eyes one can imagine. And yet, Irma Grese was the most depraved, cruel, imaginative sexual pervert I ever came across.”

But maybe the merrily laughing girls on Karl Höcker’s photo were not involved in any of this, other than helping to make the genocide machine run smoothly, maybe they were just office workers, being rewarded for their good typing, their good looks, and their forthcoming personalities? The merrily laughing men in their SS uniforms hardly, though.

Sorry, this last part of the essay turned out longer than I had intended it to be. Still, it’s all about potential, desire, and opportunity. Without the Holocaust, Maria Mandel, Margot Dreschel, Irma Gese, and all the many many others, male and female, who participated in the genocide, would most likely have led normal lives, and never have tortured or killed anybody. They might not even have been fully aware of their potential and desire to do so. They did not torture and kill their victims because they hated them so much, they did it because these were the ones they were allowed and encouraged to torture and kill.

There is an ongoing discussion whether the driving force behind rapes (and accompanying tortures, mutilations and killings) in the context of war and genocide is primarily sexual or strategic. Are rapes, tortures, killings and lootings the acts of human nature released from the

restrictions of civilization, or are they the acts of civilization at its worst, a part of the “art” of war?

The question is moot. They can be either, and they can be both. While mass rapes can be and have been a premeditated political or military strategy aimed at terrorizing the enemy/victim population, the perpetrators, whether they are members of regular armed forces, or whether in civil war or genocide everyone is invited to join in, always know how to combine purpose and pleasure.

“It appears that like looting, rape is also a by-product of war — men who would not normally enter shops and private homes to take souvenirs and ship them home find themselves doing so — women almost seem to be seen as an extension of this, further objectified and not seen as human beings with rights but as property there for the taking.” (*The Shame of War*, see below.)

“When the violence began, the violence directed at the women, not surprisingly, was sexual violence. It was directed at their sexuality. And women were raped, gang-raped. They were held in sexual slavery, both forced marriages, individual sexual slavery. They were raped with objects such as sharp sticks or weapons. These rapes were followed by sexual mutilations such as cutting off of breasts or mutilations of vaginas. And this happened throughout the country throughout the genocide, and it happened in an open fashion. (...) These were not rapes that occurred in secret. These were not rapes that occurred behind closed doors. They happened at checkpoints. They happened in cultivated fields. They happened near government buildings. They happened in or near hospitals. They happened where people had fled to seek sanctuary, such as churches. They happened in plain view, in open view, and often these women, after they were raped, were left — the bodies were left dead and spreadeagled in public view.” (...) One perpetrator later recounted that he “did not hear many [Hutu] women protesting against Tutsis being raped (...) They agreed on this, except of course if the men did their dirty sex work near the houses.” (*Sexual Violence in the Context of the Genocide in Rwanda*, see below.)

The sexual aspects of violence, and the violent aspects of sexuality, cannot possibly be disentangled.

Each war in itself is an act of rape.

Each individual or collective rape is an act of war.

War is rape.

Rape is war.

Violence beckons.

Loot beckons.

It doesn't help to pretend that they don't. Only if we acknowledge our susceptibility to their appeal — “our” meaning mankind's, but also our own — can we hope to reign it in.

Some literature on the topic:

“I Don’t Know if They Realized I was A Person.” Rape And Other Sexual Violence in the Conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia. Amnesty International, 2021.

Forensic Evidence of Torture: Investigations into Human Rights Violations. Marika Linnéa Henneberg, thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts of The University of Birmingham, Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, School of Historical Studies, September 1999.

Rape as a Weapon of War and its Long-term Effects on Victims and Society. Cassandra Clifford, Stop Modern Slavery, Washington, DC and The Foreign Policy Association, New York, NY. 7th Global Conference Violence and the Contexts of Hostility, May 2008, Budapest, Hungary.

Sexual Violence in the Context of the Genocide in Rwanda. Verena Muckermann, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 2021.

The Continuum of Sexual Violence in Occupied Germany, 1945–49. Hsu-Ming Teo, *Women’s History Review*, 5:2, 191–218, 1996.

The Shame of War. Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in Conflict. A United Nations OCHA/IRIN publication, 2007.

“They raped us in every possible way, in ways you can’t imagine.” Gendered Crimes during the Lebanese Civil Wars. *LAW – Legal Action Worldwide*, December 2021.

“We Are Going to Rape You and Taste Tutsi Women.” Rape during the 1994 Rwandan Genocide. Christopher W. Mullins, *British Journal of Criminology*, November 2009.

Or just follow the news.

Not far away, some two and a half millennia later

When much time had been consumed, and great numbers had fallen on both sides, nor had the Persians lost fewer than their adversaries, Amasis, the leader of the land-army, perceiving that, although the Barcaeans would never be conquered by force, they might be overcome by fraud, contrived as follows. One night he dug a wide trench, and laid light planks of wood across the opening, after which he brought mould and placed it upon the planks, taking care to make the place level with the surrounding ground. At dawn of day he summoned the Barcaeans to a parley: and they gladly hearkening, the terms were at length agreed upon. Oaths were interchanged upon the ground over the hidden trench, and the agreement ran thus: “So long as the ground beneath our feet stands firm, the oath shall abide unchanged; the people of Barca agree to pay a fair sum to the king, and the Persians promise to cause no further trouble to the people of Barca.” After the oath, the Barcaeans, relying upon its terms, threw open all their gates, went out themselves beyond the walls, and allowed as many of the enemy as chose to enter. Then

the Persians broke down their secret bridge, and rushed at speed into the town — their reason for breaking the bridge being that so they might observe what they had sworn; for they had promised the Barcaeans that the oath should continue “so long as the ground whereon they stood was firm.” When, therefore, the bridge was once broken down, the oath ceased to hold.

Such of the Barcaeans as were most guilty the Persians gave up to Pheretima, who nailed them to crosses all round the walls of the city. She also cut off the breasts of their wives, and fastened them likewise about the walls. The remainder of the people she gave as booty to the Persians, except only (...) those who had taken no part in the murder, to whom she handed over the possession of the town.

The History of Herodotus, Book 4. Pheretima, with the help of her Persian allies, revenged the murder of her son, Arcesilaus III of Cyrene. The events described here took place ca. 515 BCE.

The following events took place not far away, some two and a half millennia later.

These are screenshots from a subtitled Arabic language video that I saw on YouTube, but which later was deleted. It was an interview, not an interrogation. The interviewer, who was female, spoke calmly, asked her interview partner if he felt all right, and told him that he was free to abort the interview if it made him uncomfortable. He said he was ok and didn't mind talking. I regret that I didn't copy more of the interview before it disappeared.



There were some exchanges of gunfire, and when we attacked the army barrack, there were 2 men dead and 2 injured and we again could get some weapons.



We returned to the “Street of Benghazi”, and they told us, there were “dubious” (pro Gaddafi) families and we should hit them ...



... and we should take away the girls of these people.



We locked up the young girls in an annexed building of the courthouse.



They told us to rape them.



We raped them and then we cut their breasts ...

I had meant the last picture to be the end of this essay, leaving you to your own feelings and your own thoughts.

But there is one request that I have: that you ask yourself under which circumstances you might commit any of those acts of violence, or participate in them, or encourage them, or watch them, or wish for them to happen, or appreciate them, or condone them, or excuse them, or look away, or deny them, or profit from them, or shrug them off. Or secretly think they deserved it, or serves them right, or it was their own fault.

And should you say “under no circumstances ever,” then ask yourself, if this is really true.

And now I leave you to your own feelings and your own thoughts.