Jake Glasser

**Political violence is never an acceptable response to injustice. Those who resort to the sword only exacerbate collective suffering, gratifying their short-term desires at the expense of long-term prosperity and peace. The most authoritative medieval European and contemporary American thinkers advise peaceful and judicious means of action. Word Count: 47**

From the confines of prison, Martin Luther King Jr. rebuked political violence with a simple principle: "The means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek." King doubled down in his emphasis "that it is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends." This high standard should govern any response to injustice. Shane O'Neill and John of Salisbury attempt to justify political violence through essays and frameworks designed to create acceptable instances, but such action fundamentally contradicts the aims it seeks. Compelling alternatives, immorality, and its caustic effects on institutions and stability render political violence undesirable in all circumstances.

Shane O'Neill defines political violence as "actions that involve the exercise of physical force to kill, injure or harm other human beings in pursuit of a political end" (2). While O'Neill excludes property and other non-injurious forms of violence, he concedes that the definition's boundaries are negotiable. Nonetheless, O'Neill's definition is the basis of this analysis.

Whether in the jungles of Vietnam or the streets of New York, political violence renders itself a toxic force. In his "Beyond Vietnam" speech, King railed against war as a "business of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation's homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of peoples normally humane, of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped and psychologically deranged" adding that such atrocities "cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice, and love". Political violence always contradicts the lofty principles it seeks to instill, and its consequences substantially outweigh any gains against injustice. Moreover, nations that leverage political violence to counter injustice risk "approaching spiritual death" (King).

The impact of political violence extends further as critical institutions get caught in the crosshairs. The New York Draft riots exemplify this. Over 100 years before King's speech, political violence ravaged the city. Lincoln implemented a draft system to reinforce depleted Union lines, but the system initially had a fee that allowed for a substitute. Paired with many refusing to fight to liberate the enslaved, outrage among New York's working-class boiled over in July 1863. Mobs burned down black-serving orphanages, bludgeoned Union officers, and lynched many African Americans. Archbishop John Hughes of New York hobbled onto his balcony to address a crowd gathering to hear his remarks. Immediately rejecting political violence, Hughes emphasized, "it is the best policy to bear evils patiently, the more especially when they are…temporary and will soon pass away". Building on centuries of scholarship, he added, "the government is a foundation not to be destroyed…we have the right to approve or disapprove the acts of our rulers, but not to override them" (Hughes). As Hughes affirms, political violence unjustifiably undermines critical institutions.

Whether violence was used against the federal government or against the King of England, the guidance of the Catholic Church remained consistent. "Even if the king had wrongfully oppressed them, [the nobility] should not have proceeded against him by constituting themselves both judges and executors of the judgment in their own suit" ("Annulling Magna Carta," Class Reader, 386-387). Patiently bearing the injustice with an appeal to higher forms of authority remained a constant.

Appeals to higher authority, not political violence, find recognition among many revered leaders. As a rising Whig politician, Abraham Lincoln delivered his "Speech to the Young Men's Lyceum" in the aftermath of a murdered antislavery publisher by a proslavery mob. Lincoln warned the crowd of "the increasing disregard for law…the growing disposition to substitute the wild and furious passions, in lieu of the sober judgment of Courts" (Lincoln). In modern times, Lincoln and King encouraged appealing to enshrined principles and sanctified institutions as a substitute for political violence. In medieval Europe, other enlightened institutions (as well as God) served as a nonviolent check against injustice. Pope Gregory VII literally reserved the right to "absolve subjects from their fealty to wicked men" (Class Reader, 440). These compelling alternatives allow the oppressor to "learn and grow and profit from the wisdom of the brothers who are called the opposition" (King).

Of course, these institutions are not without their faults. John of Salisbury daringly notes "among [the priests] too can be found tyrants" (Class Reader, 413). What good is a check on injustice if that check is rotten from within? While it is true that just action may be further delayed, King James I of England observes that political violence still fails to "reliev[e] the commonwealth out of distress…[instead] heap[ing] double distress and desolation upon [the people]; and so their rebellion shall procure the contrary effects that they pretend it for" (James, Class Reader, 397). While the institutions of appeal are imperfect, the consequences of political violence outweigh their failings.

Political violence also normalizes force as a means of change. Lincoln cautioned, "thus it goes on, step by step, till all the walls erected for the defense of the persons and property of individuals, are trodden down, and disregarded…by instances of the perpetrators of such acts going unpunished, the lawless in spirit, are encouraged to become lawless in practice" (Lincoln). John of Salisbury highlights a similar phenomenon with monarchs: "It often comes to pass that subjects imitate the vices of their superiors, because the people desire to be like their magistrates, and everyone will eagerly follow the appetites which he observes in another who occupies a distinguished station" (Salisbury, Class Reader, 408). While there are distinctions in the cycles of violence and injustice each thinker points out, an underlying principle finds confirmation: violence often begets violence.

Despite the dangers, many profess the necessity of political violence. In the turbulence and turmoil of World War 2, FDR set a martyristic tone by declaring "the preservation of the spirit and faith of the Nation does, and will, furnish the highest justification for every sacrifice that we may make in the cause of national defense" (FDR, Class Reader, 392). As injustice encroached on the domestic doorstep, FDR swung the door open for a violent response. John of Salisbury made a similar call to arms against tyrants from within: "whatever way [tyrants disgrace the law], it is plain that it is the grace of God which is being assailed, and that it is God himself who in a sense is challenged to battle" (Salisbury, Class Reader, 409). O'Neill generalizes theories into an ethical framework that determines the appropriateness of political violence. Using five questions, he distills three main factors: necessity, effectiveness, and justness of conduct (O'Neill 9-11). But his work and the declarations of John of Salisbury and FDR hinge on one condition: "It is wrong to rule out…the possibility that some campaigns of anti-state violence against grave injustice could be justified" (Ibid 3).

Accepting that assumption, the lofty proclamations of FDR and John of Salisbury seem compelling. O'Neill's framework offers a rigorous examination to limit instances of acceptable political violence. However, King's point stands. "It is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends". Even if the perpetrator of political violence firmly believes their actions "will not lead to an escalation of violence and a desperate cycle of death…[and] that it can succeed in transforming the status quo for the better" (O'Neill 11), their violence is unjustified. Beyond being immoral, it sets a dangerous precedent for further violence. Lincoln reinforced this, arguing that normalization or violence can break down and destroy "the strongest bulwark of any Government." The precedent set by political violence makes existence a bloody affair while failing to realize the underlying intentions. In "Beyond Vietnam," King confirms that by offering two ways of life: "nonviolent coexistence or violent coannihilation".

Political violence is ostensibly acceptable but, upon closer examination, is rendered unacceptable. The tragedies that ensue create an unbearable burden of proof for its efficacy. Paired with many compelling alternatives and higher institutions of appeal, the bar rises to the stratosphere. Political violence erodes institutions that could arbitrate a peaceful and just conclusion. Ultimately, models, theories, and grand speeches cannot rationalize the crimson realities of political violence. **Word Count: 1297**

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