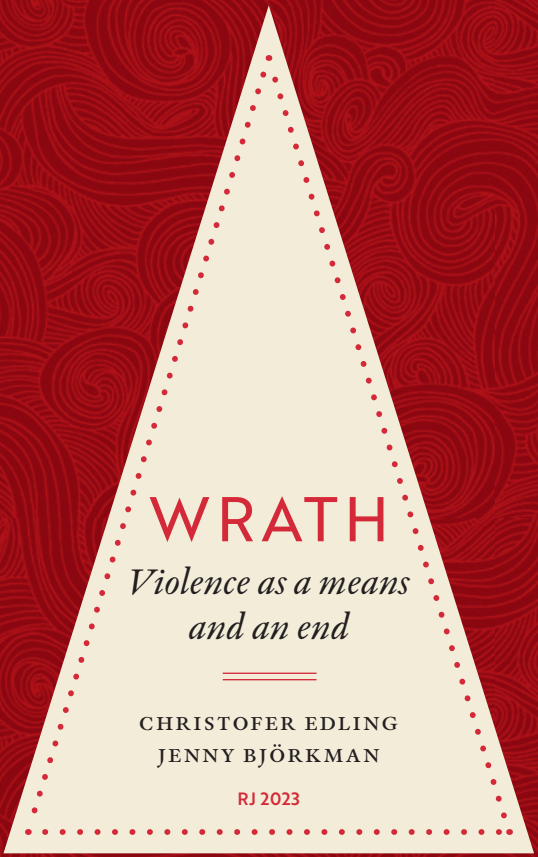
WRATH
Violence as a means and an end
CHRISTOFER EDLING
JENNY BJÖRKMAN
RJ 2023

WRATH

Violence as a means and an end

CHRISTOFER EDLING
JENNY BJÖRKMAN

Translated by Clare Barnes

Riksbankens Jubileumsfond
in collaboration with Makadam förlag

MAKADAM FÖRLAG
GÖTEBORG & STOCKHOLM
WWW.MAKADAMBOK.SE

The Deadly Sins in Our Time
is Riksbankens Jubileumsfond's essay collection for 2023
Editor: Jenny Björkman
Editorial board: Ingrid Elam, Lisa Irenius,
Sven Anders Johansson

WRATH: VIOLENCE AS A MEANS AND AN END

Graphic design: Johan Laserna
A paper edition is available through bookstores (ISBN 978-91-7061-458-3)
ISBN for this volume: 978-91-7061-958-8 (pdf)
ISSN 2000-1029

Contents

Foreword: The deadly sins in our time

Envy, gluttony, greed, pride, lust, sloth and wrath – what is the importance of the seven deadly sins, organised 1,500 years ago by Pope Gregory the Great, in contemporary Sweden? Is devoting seven essays to them really justifiable? After all, we live in one of the most secular societies in the world, a society where hell seems more likely to be the name of a nightclub than a place for sinners. Living out your lusts is not just permitted, it is considered healthy. Letting go, feeling pride, earning money and eating well are also things we value – we treat ourselves, and of course we're worth it!

At the same time, there are indications of a return of morals. The climate crisis and the lifestyle changes that must result from it, increased inequality and people with unimaginable wealth, combined with refugee flows and wars close to Sweden, are contemporary phenomena. They have led to us increasingly talking in terms of morals, at least if we are to judge by the daily press. A simple search of Swedish newspapers shows that the use of the word "morals" has increased tenfold since 2014.

Another sign of the reappearance of morality in public debate is the role played by shame in what is called cancel or call-out culture. There has been an increase in public humiliation, shaming, through the emergence of a new, internet-generated social control. Moreover, online humiliation has become a strategy for various groups to effect change, as a form of modern, shame-driven consumer power. Although most people see dangers in allowing shame to drive public discourse, there are those who argue that it can be a good thing, an effective way of changing people's morals and behaviour.

Good and evil are increasingly referenced in politics, but what some people perceive as good is perceived by others as virtue signalling – and what is that if not pride? Regarding some people as completely shameless can, on the other hand, be seen as part of the same trend. Incidentally, the word shameless was hardly used at all in the early 2000s, but has occurred more frequently since 2014. There are people who argue that we are living in a post-post-political world, a hyper-political era, in which everything is politics and can thus be categorised as good or bad. Involvement is just a click away, but is just as fleeting as love on Tinder. Mass movements die as quickly as they form, and the result is a type of overheated discussion that covers everything but has no depth, which quickly states whether something is right or wrong or good or bad, and where anyone who ends up on the wrong

side of the line can suffer the keelhauling of public opinion.

From this perspective, there is reason to return to the mortal sins and their moral claims. Also, sins and vices are individual; the aim of refraining from sin is personal salvation, not collective change. This emphasis on our own behaviour and our personal morality is symptomatic of the individualism of our time, and the focus on sins thus suits an era that celebrates the ego.

However, the deadly sins have always had an undeniably collective dimension. In 2008, when the Vatican launched seven additional deadly sins, the aim was to adapt them to contemporary global reality and to emphasise the people's social interactions: polluting the environment, morally dubious experiments, bioethical violations, drug abuse, creating poverty, excessive wealth, contributing to social inequality.

It is also worth remembering that the deadly sins are not really about the worst things humans can do, as even in the Middle Ages there were worse things than sloth and lust. Rape and murder were far more serious crimes, but the deadly sins were considered dangerous because they risked enslaving us to our own emotions, destroying our rationality and creating an addiction to the thrill of sin. The deadly sins threatened to consume us. And, like the modern, upgraded deadly sins, the old deadly sins have always referenced the sins and misdeeds that threaten to

tear society apart, and those emotions that threaten to entice us away from the good and the just.

Doesn't this sound urgent? In this essay collection, seven scholars have used their research as a basis on which to tackle a deadly sin, to test the sins' relevance in our time and to discover what they can teach us – about ourselves and about society.

In this essay, sociologist Christofer Edling and historian Jenny Björkman approach wrath on the basis of Edling's research into violent extremism. In an ideal world, we now resolve conflicts through words and not with our fists, with diplomacy, not war; wrath is thus less acceptable than ever. At the same time, we live in an angry place. Criminal gangs, violent extremists, terrorism and war are part of the daily news cycle – so what actually is the role of wrath today?

The editors

Wrath in our time

> So I thought, yeah but they're not close to me politically. But shit, I can fight. I can express my, I had so much aggression, I just wanted to get it out there. [. . .] So I left SD [. . .] I left everything. I went straight to the [Nordic] Resistance Movement.
>
> Eric[1]

> Sing, Goddess, sing of the rage of Achilles, son of Peleus that murderous anger which condemned Achaeans to countless agonies
>
> Homer, *The Iliad*[2]

Achilles and Eric are angry. Throughout human history, wrath has been part of us, seemingly an inevitable part of what makes us human. Anger can lead to death and destruction, so it is not particularly surprising that wrath is one of the seven deadly sins. Perhaps it is also the one that is most evident in contemporary society, which favours civilised conversation over fights and clenched fists?

However, despite the obvious fact that anger, especially the violence that can result from anger, is wrong, we seem

to be living in an angry place: Sweden is experiencing a new record year for the number of fatal shootings. Some people regard war as organised rage[3] and, in 2022, a new war erupted in Europe, just 1,300 kilometres from Stockholm. Debates, political manoeuvring and actions are usually expressions of anger. The affective polarisation between political opponents, which we are used to from the US, is now also evident in Sweden.[4]

Stanford Lyman, one of the few sociologists to show an interest in the deadly sins, argues that they can help researchers understand moral concepts from which modern sociology has distanced itself in favour of more neutral concepts.[5] Wrath, he points out, has a fundamental position: of all the sins, it must be subdued first, to ensure the social order. Referring to Georg Simmel and echoing Thomas Hobbes, Lyman argues that, on the one hand, people's anger must be controlled to hold society together but, on the other hand, this control must itself have an inherent capacity for anger towards those who violate the legitimate order.

Wrath is thus central to understanding both individuals and society. This text focuses on people like Eric, the young man who for various reasons – not least to fight and vent his anger – joined the Nordic Resistance Movement. In many ways, violent extremism is a suitable prism for examining the deadly sin of anger in today's society; just as war is said to organise anger, so do these organisa-

tions, and they do so in a society that distances itself from violence and organised anger in a variety of ways.

The point of departure for this essay is research carried out by a research group at the Institute for Futures Studies, which seeks to understand violent extremism based on a distinction between antisocial careers and social organisation.[6] By antisocial careers, we mean the personal life course that describes a person's entry into, activity within and exit from these types of environments. By social organisation, we mean these environments' spontaneous and often non-formal organisation. We use a broad definition of violent extremism, in which we include a variety of environments and forms, characterised by the way they challenge the state's monopoly on violence. This includes everything from street gangs, criminal motorcycle gangs and football firms, to subversive extremism. The latter includes violent Islamism, left-wing extremism and right-wing extremism, as well as violent animal rights and environmental extremism.

Wrath is present in all these contexts, and it could even be said that some of them have turned anger into a virtue. This essay will focus especially on violent Islamism and right-wing extremism.

An angry place?

So, is Sweden a particularly angry place? Actually, the Gallup analytics company has conducted what it calls a measurement of the *world's emotional temperature,* which could provide an indication.[7] In 2021, a random sample of people in more than 120 countries were asked to provide a "yes" or "no" answer to a question about whether they had experienced a number of emotional states, including anger, on the day before the survey. In Lebanon, 49 per cent said that yes, they experienced anger yesterday, followed by Turkey (48 per cent), Armenia (46 per cent), Iraq (46 per cent) and Afghanistan (41 per cent). The five countries with the lowest proportion of people who experienced anger the previous day were the Netherlands (8 per cent), Portugal (8 per cent), Estonia (6 per cent), Mauritius (6 per cent) and Finland (5 per cent). In Sweden, 9 per cent responded that they had experienced anger on the previous day.

There are also regular surveys of populations' emotional states and, for the past 10 years, the *World Happiness Report* has been published, in which Finland, closely fol-

lowed by Denmark, is reported to have the happiest population in the world. In 2021, Sweden was the world's seventh happiest country, and the world's least happy country was Afghanistan.[8]

Based on such comparisons, Sweden is not a particularly angry country, nor is it an area with a particularly wrathful population. However, these types of Gallup surveys should – of course – be interpreted with great caution and a large pinch of salt. Moreover, they do not tell us whether our times are particularly angry or more angry than other times – war, crime and polarisation could indicate this, but there is also research that shows the world is becoming less violent.[9]

The extreme environments that are the focus of studies on violent extremism are indeed *extreme*; they attract people – particularly young men – who do feel rage. These young men are attracted by organisations that want to exploit this rage for various purposes, not least political ones.

Emotions, or feelings, are mostly attributed to individuals. Individuals become angry, and it is only as an individual that you can feel and experience emotions. Of course, animals can also be angry, happy, scared, etcetera, and there is biological evidence that even insects have emotions,[10] but humans are the only ones to regard some emotions as wrong or even sinful. Similarly, only among humans can anger (and other emotions) be organised and

exploited. This is because emotions are also social; an individual's emotions are created, experienced, lived out and reinforced in relation to other people.

Settings for violent extremism appear to promote or even exploit anger, with it being seen as a positive force from which these political (reformatory or revolutionary) movements can draw strength. The past and present provide us with many examples of how anger at perceived injustices generate potentially subversive engagement and organisation. Not only this, wrath, despite being a deadly sin, seems to be something that even heroes and even the Old Testament God feels. In anger, God punishes Adam and Eve by banishing them from the Garden of Eden, and spares only Noah while drowning the rest of humanity. The wrath of God is found in multiple places in the Bible.

In his research, historian Jens Ljunggren has focused on how emotions, particularly anger, have influenced politics, something he calls emotionology, or emotional politics. Much can be said about this research focus, but it is interesting that Ljunggren claims that anger, for example, governed the politics of the Social Democrats in the early twentieth century, that the labour movement not only wanted to achieve material benefits, but also pursued a policy of enhancing pride. Maintaining anger was important in achieving the movement's goals.[11]

The mobilising effect of anger is therefore not a sur-

prise, nor is it unique to the violent extremists of our time.

Similarly, we can also see how a society challenged by criminal gangs and the organisations we studied, responds by mobilising a kind of counter-rage. The criminal policy debate in Sweden reflects this dynamic, where the response to the anger exposed through the shootings and explosions is increasingly angry political statements about repressive police action and harder penalties. Our current return to a more repressive punishment policy, where the focus is not on treatment, care and adjustment to good citizenship, but on punishment as punishment, can also be regarded as a form of counter-rage. This is where incapacitation, the spatial barriers to crime, become important, which is perhaps most clearly visible in the political proposal to rename the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, which is responsible for prisons, probation and remand centres, to the "Punishment Service".

However, from an international perspective, despite shootings and polarisation, contemporary Sweden can hardly be seen as a particularly angry place. Anger is still seen as a problem, perhaps even a deadly sin. However, in violent settings, anger is exploited.

Violent extremism

Defining the concept of violent extremism is not entirely easy. This may be because it is not really a scientific term, but an operational and bureaucratic umbrella term, meaning that it is used by authorities and other organisations that want to target certain groups. Here, it is used for movements that claim they want to change society, even overthrow it, using violence as a means.

In some of the violent extremist movements at the centre of this essay, it is particularly clear that anger is the objective of their activities. They are striving for a society in which anger rules more than it now does. Right-wing extremist movements celebrate violence and anger as a principle; they see anger as a male privilege, one that has been suppressed in our modern, feminine and "soya-milk-influenced" society. According to these ideas, the ideals of the majority society threaten to ultimately destroy men and masculinity.

Anger can also be seen as an authoritarian privilege and, in movements that celebrate authority and strong leaders, this is not unimportant. Anger then becomes a

virtue, something to act upon. Here, even though anger has been a deadly sin since the Middle Ages, there are clear links to both the Bible and the Koran, as well as to Western culture in general. Quite simply, there are battles that are worth fighting, which these movements like to reference. As we have said, Achilles was a hero and his anger was justified.

Anger combined with aggression is often regarded by violent extremist movements as both an end and a means – something that Eric, quoted at the beginning of the essay, indicated. Football firms want to fight, and the violence capital of street gangs is important for intimidating rival groups. For many of the young men drawn to violent extremism, the violence is precisely what attracts them.

However, before going further, it is important to briefly mention the difficulties entailed by studying these groups. In general, it is difficult to study people who do not want to be recognised or who do not want their criminal behaviour to be known, and violent extremists are no exception. While these groups sometimes have designated spokespersons, their activities depend on keeping information about them hidden from the outside world. In many cases, there is also considerable internal secrecy – not least because they often commit crimes.

These difficulties exist not only for researchers, but also for the police, security services and other authorities who have considerable power and resources. Researchers who

do not pose a direct threat to the groups, unlike the police, work with high demands for transparency and principles of research ethics that involve consent and consideration for research subjects. This means that, as researchers, we are limited in our choice of methods, which may affect the results we obtain. Qualitative studies, often using snowball sampling (a non-random sample where the researchers use already selected interviewees to find other individuals), are the most common approach, not only in Sweden, but also internationally. There are thus many studies of various extremist groups based on *small* samples, but fewer larger surveys with reliable statistical analyses.

The Swedish Security Service, which is tasked with monitoring violent movements, has been warning of the threat from extremists for at least the last decade, both in terms of constitutional threats and threats of attacks. It has specifically identified violent right-wing extremism and violent Islamism, but has been cautious about specifying the size of these groups. The research group at the Institute for Futures Studies has had access to information from the Swedish Police Authority and the Swedish Security Service regarding the number of people in these environments; the data includes all the known violent extremists in Sweden around 2017, just over 15,000 individuals.[12] This is the group at the centre of the discussion about anger as a driving force and objective for violent extremism.

Angry young men: wrath as a point of departure

In interview surveys that study why people engage in violent extremism, there are often references to feelings – not least anger – that arise from wounded self-esteem. These young male interviewees are reminiscent of the hero Achilles; their decisions are the result of a tough combination of anger and aggression. Joining a new group is a common way of dealing with frustration, and the interviewees have felt frustration, irritation and a lack of validation before joining these extreme groups.

This kind of wounded pride as a cause of anger has been discussed for centuries. Two thousand years ago, Seneca the Younger, one of the more famous Stoics, claimed that anger was just a burning desire for revenge, so no good could come of it. There is no justified anger for Seneca, but he has rarely been unchallenged. Aristotle saw clear associations between fear and anger, so anger was important for those who wanted to fight wars and battles. Anger took the edge off fear, making young men better soldiers. As we have said, justified anger is also found in the Bible. Although none of the men we studied refer to

Aristotle, it is apparent that anger is at the centre of their lives and that they see their anger as justified.

However, associations with anger are not only found in the young men's own statements, but also through a link to other violent crime which, for the sake of simplicity, we see as a sign of rage. In order to prove the link to previous violence, we have checked the information on violent extremists against the Swedish national register of persons suspected of criminal offences, a register at the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) that documents all reported suspected crimes in Sweden.

In the 2017 data, there are 785 people in the violent Islamist setting, 183 in violent left-wing extremism, the "autonomous" setting, and 382 people in the violent right-wing extremist white power setting. If violent crime can be characterised as a sign of rage, the violent right-wing extremist communities are the angriest group: they were significantly more participatory in violent offences, but underrepresented in drug offences, for example. Left-wing extremist and Islamist groups were also over-represented in violent crime, and somewhat underrepresented in drug offences. Economic crime was more common in the violent Islamist setting than the others.

These are small numbers, but they tell us something. They indicate that men who are already violent are attracted to these groups, and that they are people who are, in many ways, already on the margins of society. This can

be seen as an indication that these settings for violent extremism, particularly right-wing extremism, capture the anger that the rest of society has rejected and distanced itself from.

We see similar tendencies in surveys of the criminal cooperation in violent Swedish motorcycle gangs.[13] Members at the centre of the gang tend to be over-represented in suspicions of financial crime, while people on the periphery of the gang are over-represented in violent (and drug-related) crime. Similar indications are seen among Swedish jihadists. In a study of 38 deceased Swedes who travelled to Syria and Iraq to fight, two-thirds were suspected of crimes before they left; assault, weapons offences, theft and robbery were the most common types.[14] Many of these foreign fighters were part of various criminal organisations that were *not* related to violent Islamism.

Interviews with people who have left these violent settings show that many of them already had criminal experience when they joined extreme movements, often in violent crime.[15] The boundary between violent extremism and other crime is thus fluid, which international research also indicates. The observation that violent extremists often have a criminal record is consistent, and the link between crime and terrorism has been demonstrated time and again. A US study of 40 people who had exited violent right-wing extremism is also a reminder of this, with

many being hardened criminals; 27 had a violent past, 18 had been to prison.

Moreover, researchers were able to show that the decision to *leave* the environment was also rooted in growing anger. The three main drivers of this new anger were disappointment at the discrepancy between idealised expectations and perceived realities, feelings of guilt towards family members, especially their own children, and (perceived) unjust violence.[16]

The young men who are drawn to violent environments thus already have criminal records, are angry and do not seem to see anger – in the sense of violence – as problematic. General crime prevention and law enforcement measures for young criminals are thus also means to prevent and counteract radicalisation and entry into violent extremist environments. The recurring theme is crime and how it seems to act as a gateway to violent extremism.

However, not all criminals are attracted to violent extremist groups. In Norway, sociologists have studied how Muslim drug dealers reacted to the increased presence of jihadists in Oslo, showing that many of them strongly distanced themselves from jihadism, both in terms of worldview and actions. Jihadists could be accused of being unmanly and resistance to extremist Islamism could sometimes be violent,[17] such as in this interview with "Magan":

> I don't believe they practice what they preach, man! If they really believe that shit about martyrs and 72 virgins [starts shouting and gesticulating with his steak knife]… Why are you still here? Why are you trying to get me killed? Why don't you get yourself killed? […] Nonsense! Fucking nonsense! [Continues in a calmer voice] I get angry because I have family members who died because of this bullshit.[18]

Magan's anger is obvious, but here it is directed not at society but at the extremist environment. It is also interesting that jihadists are regarded as unmanly but, like the violent jihadists, Magan does not see the anger as problematic, or a deadly sin, but as justified.

Ideological wrath: when wrath is an objective

Two pro-violence settings lend themselves particularly well to testing whether there is such a thing as ideological anger: one is the extreme left-wing setting, and the other is the right-wing extremism. In both these groups, rage is an important driving force. They want to seize power and overthrow contemporary society through violence and organised anger.

Here we will focus on right-wing extremism, partly because it is the environment that the Security Service considers to pose the greatest threat, and partly because it is the largest in terms of the number of actors, which is also indicated by media reporting. In an analysis of four years of articles (1990, 2000, 2010 and 2019) on violence and extremism in seven Swedish evening and daily newspapers, about one fifth of the articles (out of 813 articles) deal with violent extremism.[19] Of these, 36 per cent deal with right-wing extremism, 30 per cent with jihadism and 21 per cent with left-wing extremism. Moreover, the right-wing extremist milieu is ideologically stricter and thus more interesting for our purpose than the more diverse left-wing extremist environments.

In their account of Nazi-motivated crime in Sweden, researchers Christer Mattsson and Heléne Lööw argue that National Socialism has elevated the struggle to a way of life.[20] A Nazi movement, they argue, is not just a struggle for political power; unlike many other political ideologies, Nazism today fights a kind of total physical *and* spiritual battle that also includes power over "history, culture, lifestyle". This is a struggle based on and motivated by anti-Semitism, which came to its full expression in the Holocaust. In Nazism, hatred of Jews is formulated as a struggle for destiny and a life-and-death struggle for space in which to live. Hate is not synonymous with anger, but when anger has been discussed as a deadly sin, hatred is part of the definition. Allowing yourself to be controlled by hatred, or revenge, is thus one of the many ugly expressions of this deadly sin. When hatred thus controls ideology, it can be said that it is both controlled by anger and that anger is its objective. In the ideology of Nazism, anger is cold, persistent and decisive, both as a prerequisite for the movement's cohesion and as a socio-political driving force. Nazism also serves as an ideal type for the anger that permeates the movements more commonly referred to as right-wing extremism.[21]

However, even though the white power movement represents a kind of ideological rage, for many people attracted to the right-wing extremist movement, such as the interviewee, Eric, it is the sheer violence that is attractive:

> And I think it looks so fucking great that they, well, that they beat them here. I don't like these people. Then I was watching that and [Free Nationalists] showed me a film on the [Nordic] Resistance Movement. And they were out on the street, like I wanted to get out, politically. Out on, yes … and fought them. So I thought, yeah but they're not close to me politically. But shit, I can fight. I can express my, I had so much aggression, I just wanted to get it out there. […] So I left SD [the Sweden Democrats] and broke with the Free Nationalists, I didn't want, that being free and Free Nationalists, I left everything. I went straight to the [Nordic] Resistance Movement.[22]

Violence, seen here as a kind of practised rage, can thus also be seen as an important part of the movements and a way for them to attract young men. In research on violent extremism, the thesis is that violence itself is part of the attraction: violence or anger becomes valued and a kind of virtue.

From this perspective, the temporal context in which the person is located is crucial. If we assume that a proportion of all young men are attracted by the possibility of both belonging to a group and having an outlet for their aggression, it is not surprising that Swedish-born young men in rural areas are attracted to right-wing extremist environments, that young men in immigrant-dense suburbs are attracted to Islamist environments, or that Swedish-born young men in big cities become football hooligans. The anger that these young men feel and

are attracted to is not expressed in a society that rejects violence, aggression and hatred.

We have already mentioned that anger also plays a role in leaving violent movements, for which disappointment that ideals were not really reflected in reality is an established explanation.[23] However, the anger towards society and the desire to fight can fade away. The abovementioned Eric, who has now left violent right-wing extremism, said:

> That was [...] one thing that bothered me, that I thought we were acting like clowns. Walking around town and shouting in megaphones, this isn't... it's not my thing. I can't, I don't want [to] stand for this and hold this flag... [...] I was tired of the fights, I was tired of everything. [...] I started getting weaker. Mentally and physically.
>
> [...]
>
> And I was just fed up, and I got into a fight... I got so fed up. And just pissed off. I wanted peace and quiet. I was tired of the whole thing, standing on the street and talking politics that I didn't even support, and the people who were just ranting [...].[24]

Eric was simply no longer as angry, could not represent the ideals and even thought that he and the others were foolish, walking around shouting in megaphones. Wrath was no longer a driving force.

Religious wrath

> They forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies.[25]

In the common idiom, the term holy wrath is mostly used to express a particularly strong anger at some injustice. In theology, holy wrath denotes the anger of the punishing God at apostates. This quote about the Israelites from the Book of Judges is one such well-known example of a particularly angry God. The Bible also provides examples of anger as a positive force for change; Jesus is clearly angry when he drives the traders from the temple. So anger, properly utilised, is not only a deadly sin, but also an important driving force in both Christianity and Islam. And here these religions fall into a long Western tradition of celebrating anger as a path to victory, not least in war and battle.

The mediaeval crusades and jihadism are both associated with Christian and Islamic ideas about holy wars.

Originally, *jihad* means struggle, but has now been adopted by violent Islamic extremism. What is striking about these movements is the paradoxical willingness to use apparently indiscriminate violence, while referring to religions whose central message is absolute opposition to the use of violence. This is also present in modern Christianity, such as the Lord's Resistance Army on the African continent, or the Ku Klux Klan and, later, extremist evangelical circles in the United States, but is most prominent in violent Islamism, more specifically Salafist jihadism and Takfiri jihadism.

In Sweden, this violent branch of faith is mainly found among Islamists, particularly among those known as Salafists, a literalist branch of Sunni Islam. According to the historian of ideas and theologian Mohammad Fazlhashemi, Salafists have a very rigid attitude towards other Muslims, and most things simply violate their view of what is right, where anything that is not right should, according to them, be punished by excommunication. This is called *takfir* and affects anyone suspected of being a heretic, infidel or unbeliever. In the worst case, these Muslims should not only be excluded and excommunicated, but eliminated.[26] The Salafists' unrelentingly strict view of what is right, combined with the takfir or excommunication, which often involves literally killing unbelievers, can of course be interpreted as a form of religious anger.

Just as with the ideological anger that drew young men to right-wing extremist movements, there is evidence that many of those attracted to Salafism and jihadism are angry young men. In interviews, people who have left violent Islamist extremism, like those who were attracted to right-wing extremist movements, demonstrate frustration about not feeling at home with the values of the majority society. Several interviewees also talked about the possibility of a moral alternative. This is how Isa describes the route in:

> You think, this is not something for me, they're a bit too soft, or a bit too . . . they don't follow what's written, quite simply. They have what you think is an adapted interpretation of reality, of what it says. Based on the message. Based on the real source, you think that this is. . . this is a distorted version to suit the West, to make the West happy, to live in the West.[27]

Again, the search for a clearer, less weak world can be seen here. In many ways, this is similar to how others drawn to violent extremist groups have argued. Once again, majority society is portrayed as soft and ordinary Muslims as spineless; what is sought is simply a slightly harder but clearer world, one where right is right and wrong is wrong, and where justified anger can be used to settle the faults and shortcomings of majority society.

This is associated with the picture surrounding the

people who joined ISIS. In conversations and correspondence with some of the people who travelled to Syria in the 2010s to join ISIS, Sara Johansson, a researcher in social work, provides an image of the reason for these travellers' decisions, which includes the lure of aggressive and destructive violence.[28] Johansson quotes one of her informants as saying:

> The Shia are the worst threat to Islam. The only ones I could travel down there and just kill are the Shia.[29]

But rage is also expressed in other ways. Many of those who travelled there testify to what they believe is a righteous anger and a desire to do the right thing. They refer to "higher and nobler" moral values and the duty to stand up against injustice:

> While you were at home laughing and eating pizza, this happened. Islam says that a Muslim must resist oppression and defend the weak, the poor and those who cannot take care of themselves.[30]

Here, just as in the extreme right-wing, anger becomes a virtue, and thus a higher duty. Not fighting or using violence and justified anger, against injustice (which here may also be other interpretations of Islam) is to do wrong. Engaging in violence and indulging in anger is better than indifference, ignoring God.

Wrath as a virtue

Achilles, Eric and Isa are angry, but nowadays only Achilles is seen as a hero. Wrath is – despite us living on a violent planet – a mortal sin and remains so, even in our time. However, there are pockets of society where anger has been transformed into a virtue, where it is valued and protected; this is not least true in violent extremist settings.

These environments offer examples of how anger in the form of violence is celebrated, but, for some of them, anger is also the very essence of what they do. Anger is both a means and an end. Violent Islamists and the white power movement both celebrate struggle and violence; for them, a good society cannot be realised without struggle and conflict, and they have taken it upon themselves to engage in this conflict. For both organisations, this means that the struggle becomes sacred and the anger that is otherwise seen as non-normative and wrong becomes a virtue.

However, research on violent extremism shows that the people who are attracted to these groups – whether they be street gangs or subversive organisations – have already been exposed to violence at an early stage. They are, quite

simply, drawn to an environment that encourages anger and violence. In this way, these environments capture an anger that is condemned by the majority society.

Achilles, who is portrayed as so angry in the opening of the *Iliad*, later has a conversation with the father of the enemy he has killed, which softens him; sometimes this is seen as a sign of his heroic status. On the other hand, it is clear that society, while superficially distancing itself from anger, also fuels it and celebrates it. This is done in the Bible, as we have seen, and it is done today when we cheer on the good fight. Even in the majority society, anger can – in some contexts – be seen as the basis and fuel for righteous struggle. Take, for example, Ingrid Sjöstrand's poem from 1979, which has ever since been used in both the peace movement and the #metoo movement:

Elda under din vrede	Fire up your rage
med maktens nyheter	with the news of power
Dämpa inte din smärta	Do not soothe your pain
över livet	at the life
som stjäls ifrån oss	that was stolen from us
Trösta inte din sorg	Do not console your grief
över världen	at the world
som våldtas	that is raped
inför våra ögon	before our eyes
Elda under din vrede[31]	Fire up your rage

Such a call also says something about the deadly sin of wrath in our time.

Notes

Christofer Edling would like to thank the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency and the Marianne and Marcus Wallenberg Foundation for research funding.

1. Amir Rostami, Hernan Mondani, Christoffer Carlsson, Joakim Sturup, Jerzy Sarnecki & Christofer Edling, *Våldsbejakande extremism och organiserad brottslighet i Sverige*, Forskningsrapport 2018:4, Stockholm: Institute for Futures Studies, 2018, p. 66.

2. Homer, "Iliad", http://people.uncw.edu/deagona/lit/Iliad%20excerpts.pdf.

3. Robert A.F. Thurman, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Anger*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 12.

4. Hanna Bäck & Andrej Kokkonen, "Affektiv polarisering bland riksdagsledamöterna", in Patrik Öhberg, Henrik Oscarsson & Jakob Ahlbom (eds.), *Folkviljans förverkligare*, Gothenburg: Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg, 2022.

5. Stanford Lyman, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Society and Evil*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978.

6. On the research group that includes Christofer Edling, see also Rostami et al. 2018.

7. "What Is the World's Emotional Temperature?", Gallup 2021, https://news.gallup.com/interactives/248240/global-emotions.aspx.

8. "Happiest Countries in the World 2021", https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/happiest-countries-in-the-world.

9. The positive trend towards greater democratisation, on the other hand, seems not only to have stalled but to have returned to the 1989 level. Six of the 27 EU member states are moving in an autocratic direction and today 70% of the world's population lives in a dictatorship. There are clear indications that we are heading for worse times. See Vanessa A. Boese, Nazifa Alizada, Martin Lundstedt, Kelly Morrison, Natalia Natsika, Yuko Sato, Hugo Tai & Staffan I. Lindberg, *Autocratization Changing Nature? Democracy Report 2022*, Varieties of Democracy Institute 2022, https://www.v-dem.net/publications/democracy-reports/.

10. E.g. Lars Chittka, *The Mind of a Bee*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022.

11. Jens Ljunggren, *Den uppskjutna vreden: Socialdemokratisk känslopolitik från 1880- till 1980-talet*, Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2015.

12. See Rostami et al. 2018 for an account of the limitations and opportunities of data and ethical considerations.

13. Hernan Mondani & Amir Rostami, "Criminal Nomads: The Role of Multiple Memberships in the Criminal Collaboration Network Between Hells Angels MC and Bandidos MC", *Global Crime*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2022, pp. 193–215. Here, the term "motorcycle gangs" refers to outlaw motorcycle gangs, i.e. groups for which explicit exclusion from the majority society is an end in itself.

14. Amir Rostami, Joakim Sturup, Hernan Mondani, Pia Thevselius, Jerzy Sarnecki & Christofer Edling, "The Swedish Mujahideen: An Exploratory Study of 41 Swedish Foreign Fighters Deceased in Iraq and Syria", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 43, no. 5, 2020, pp. 382–395.

15. Rostami et al. 2018.

16. Pete Simi, Steven Windisch, Daniel Harris & Gina Ligon, "Anger From Within: The Role of Emotions in Disengagement From Violent Extremism", *Journal of Qualitative Criminal Justice & Criminology*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2019.

17. Sébastien Tutenges & Sveinung Sandberg, "Street Culture Meets

Extremism: How Muslims Involved in Street Life and Crime Oppose Jihadism", *The British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 62, 2022, pp. 1502–1517.

18. Tutenges & Sandberg, p. 1508.

19. Ester Pollack, "Våld och extremism i svensk press, 1990–2019", in Amir Rostami & Jerzy Sarnecki (eds.), *Det svenska tillståndet: En antologi om brottsutvecklingen i Sverige*, Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2022.

20. Christer Mattsson & Heléne Lööw, "'Kampen som livsform': Nationalsocialism, fascism och våld – en historisk översikt", in Amir Rostami & Jerzy Sarnecki (eds.), *Det svenska tillståndet: En antologi om brottsutvecklingen i Sverige,* Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2022.

21. Mattsson & Lööw 2022, p. 380.

22. Rostami et al. 2018, p. 66.

23. Tore Bjørgo, "Dreams and disillusionment: Engagement in and disengagement from militant extremist groups", *Crime, Law and Social Change*, vol. 55, no. 4, 2011, pp. 277–285.

24. Rostami et al. 2018, p. 71.

25. Book of Judges 2:13–14.

26. Mohammad Fazlhashemi, "Takfirism", in Christofer Edling & Amir Rostami (eds.), *Våldsbejakande extremism: En forskarantologi,* SOU 2017:67, p. 55.

27. Rostami et al. 2018, p. 67.

28. Sara Johansson, *Mellan orten och kalifatet: En studie om utresandefenomenet*, Örebro: Örebro Studies in Social Work 26, 2022.

29. Johansson 2022, p. 347.

30. Johansson 2022, p. 345.

31. Ingrid Sjöstrand, "Elda under din vrede", in *Det blåser en sol*, Stockholm: Författarförlaget, 1979.

Riksbankens Jubileumsfond: promotes, inspires and participates

Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (RJ) is an independent foundation with the goal of promoting Swedish research in the humanities and social sciences. The foundation was established through a resolution in the Swedish Riksdag in 1964, when a donation from Riksbanken (the Swedish Central Bank) was approved and the statutes adopted. RJ's establishment was part of the tercentenary celebrations of the world's oldest, still operating, central bank. These celebrations also included the Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel and the bank building on Brunkebergstorg, Stockholm. By establishing a foundation, the Riksdag and the Riksbank hoped to benefit a pressing national cause: scientific research linked to Sweden.

For more than fifty years, the foundation has promoted research in the humanities and social sciences.

In 2022, total funding for research and collaboration amounted to more than SEK 500 million. Hundreds of researchers in these disciplines have received grants for conducting research, building infrastructures and networks, establishing new contacts and participating in conferences and seminars, as well as in public debate.

RJ 2023

The Deadly Sins in Our Time

Editor: Jenny Björkman

Editorial board: Ingrid Elam, Lisa Irenius, Sven Anders Johansson

Do we live in an angry time, in an angry country? The high number of fatal shootings indicates that we do. However, even if the issue is more complex than this, violent extremist movements are interesting examples of perhaps the most apparent of deadly sins, wrath. In these settings, anger and aggression are the means for achieving a particular objective. Additionally, wrath – among violent Islamists and the white power movement – appears to have become an end in itself, a virtue. The question is whether this is the aspect that makes these movements attractive to potential members; they are enticed by a setting in which anger and violence are celebrated. These groups thus channel an anger that is condemned by majority society, but which nonetheless exists.

In 2023, Riksbankens Jubileumsfond is issuing a collection of essays on *The Deadly Sins in Our Time*. In their essay, sociologist Christofer Edling and historian Jenny Björkman focus on wrath's role in contemporary society.

RJ 2023: *The Deadly Sins in Our Time*
Riksbankens Jubileumsfond
in collaboration with Makadam förlag

ISBN 978-91-7061-458-3

RIKSBANKENS JUBILEUMSFOND
FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES