

UDC 172:342.7N. V. BORODINA^{1*}, Y. M. MELNYK^{2*}^{1*}Ukrainian National Tchaikovsky Academy of Music (Kyiv, Ukraine), e-mail borodina.nataliya.v@gmail.com, ORCID 0000-0001-7502-518X^{2*}Odesa National University of Technology (Odesa, Ukraine), e-mail ynmelnik@gmail.com, ORCID 0000-0001-7020-842X**Tolerance Limits of Cruelty in the Philosophy of the 20th Century:
The Possibility of an Ambivalent Interpretation**

Purpose. The research explores the ambivalent interpretations of the tolerance limits of cruelty in 20th-century philosophy. **Theoretical basis.** The research is based on the concepts of Jean-Paul Sartre, Georges Bataille, and Albert Camus, who do not justify cruelty but demonstrate its potential legitimacy under certain circumstances. **Originality.** The authors have identified three main perspectives on tolerating cruelty, which form the foundation for an ambivalent interpretation. These perspectives include the justification of cruelty as necessary in the struggle for social justice (Sartre), the justification of cruelty towards oneself as a consequence of human rights and freedoms (Camus), and the justification of epistemological cruelty as a means to expand the boundaries of knowledge (Bataille). **Conclusions.** The ambivalent interpretation of cruelty, as exemplified by Bataille, Camus, and Sartre, blurs the tolerance limits of cruelty and creates opportunities for manipulations that may infringe upon people's rights and freedoms. If Camus's concept remains within the limits of respect for human dignity, then in Sartre's interpretation, a person can be perceived as a tool for social struggle, and in Bataille – as an opportunity to gain a new ecstatic experience through cruel treatment of others.

Keywords: cruelty; violence; human rights; modern philosophy; Bataille; Sartre; Camus

Introduction

In the 20th and 21st centuries, two parallel processes have been observed: while international organizations are trying to make cruel treatment impossible, there is a tendency to aestheticize/romanticize cruelty. One of the most important reasons for these opposing tendencies is the ambivalence in the interpretation of cruelty, which was demonstrated by some of the most popular philosophers in the 20th century, such as Sartre, Camus, and Bataille. They did not promote cruelty but noted its possibility and justification in some cases.

The influence of philosophical concepts on the perception of cruelty is insufficiently studied, although the topic of cruelty/cruel treatment itself has been widely studied in legal circles and has become the subject of international conferences and UN assemblies. Ukraine is also actively working to combat torture and cruel treatment at various levels – from legislative to international cooperation. However, the tendency to justify cruelty remains strong, especially in closed institutions, where cruel treatment is very difficult to reveal and the stereotype that cruelty "for the sake of the goal" is justified and permissible is often triggered in public consciousness.

Analysis of recent publications. Among the latest publications, it is worth noting the review-historical monograph by V. Sliusar (2017) "Violence: Socio-Philosophical", and the research by S. P. Shevtsov (2022), in which he notes an interesting feature of philosophical trends that tolerate violence: "The recognition of the regularity and necessity of violence is based mainly on the belief in the limited capabilities of the human mind, as well as the imperfection of human nature and the structure of the human community" (p. 50).

Regarding research specifically on the problem of the ambivalent interpretation of cruelty in modern philosophy, it is worth noting the research on Sartre's concept by Professor R. Santoni (2013) from Yale University, research on Bataille's concept by Professor J. Ang Mei Sze (2010)

from the University of Singapore, Professor C. Dorchain (2022) from the Berlin University, Professor A. Evangelou (2010) from the University of Kent and Professor S. Bush (2012) from Brown University.

Purpose

The purpose of the research is to determine the tolerance limits of cruelty in twentieth-century philosophy, which was characterized by an ambivalent interpretation of this phenomenon.

Statement of basic materials

The perception of cruelty as a necessary element was characteristic of many stages in history (for example, "cruelty to find out the truth" in Christian torture and torment or "The End Justifies the Means" by I. Loyola), but scientists and human rights activists gradually limited the tolerance of cruelty and taught humanity that cruel treatment cannot be justified even by a good purpose. According to the "Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment", unacceptably cruel acts (torture) are considered "any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person" (Council of Europe, 1950).

Cruelty runs a red line among the artistic experiments of the early 20th century: the searches for Viennese actionism, and Antonin Artaud's "The Theatre of Cruelty" were inspired by Nietzsche's philosophy and the idea of testing the boundaries. In biology, discussions continue on Darwin's thesis that only the strongest survive (with an attempt to transfer this conclusion to the human sciences), economics is still under the influence of Malthus, who predicted an inevitable shortage of resources and therefore war and the need for cruelty.

Nietzsche's outrageous these were the prerequisite for the fascination with the theme of cruelty at the beginning of the 20th century. They declared that cruelty is an attribute of courageous people: "There are many cruel people who are only too cowardly for cruelty" (Nietzsche, 2013).

According to Nietzsche (2013), cruelty permeates the universe and is an integral part of human nature, distorted by morality (with the help of Socrates, who wanted to bring man closer to the ideals of Apollo, but in reality, man is closer to Dionysus): "the eternal joy of becoming," – the philosopher writes, – that joy which also encompasses joy in destruction", and for art and creativity, destruction is positive, because creativity requires intoxication, including intoxication with cruelty, destruction, which gives "the feeling of an increase in strength and fullness".

It is the strong person who openly admits their cruelty: "There is also a pessimism of strength! Intellectual propensity for the cruel, terrible, evil, mysterious in existence, caused by well-being, overflowing with health, fullness of existence?", but a weak person hides behind virtues, although: "Vaunted virtue achieves its goal in the same ways as immorality: cruelty and the imperious establishment" (Nietzsche, 2022).

Also, in Nietzsche's (2013) understanding, cruelty is an attribute of a person's creative search: "secret self-violence, the cruelty of the artist, the joy of giving oneself a form as a heavy, elastic, suffering material". So, from Nietzsche's hints, we can conclude that a strong and creative person must be cruel. The romanticizing of cruelty occurs through attribution (similar to the romanticizing of smoking) – we see this trait in artistic images of strong people and unconsciously conclude that if we want to look like strong people, we must imitate their attributes.

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Bataille provides an analysis of artistic images that also lead us to a similar conclusion – this is the cruelty of Heathcliff's revenge in Emily Bronte, the cruelty of Baudelaire's "Flowers of Evil", the cruelty of sacrifices in Michelet's "The Witch", the joy of cruelty in the fascination with the terror of the French Revolution in Blake's poems, the thirst for self-destruction of Sade, cruelty to loved ones in the works of Proust, the cruelty of being a rebellious child in Kafka and Genet. Nietzsche only theoretically substantiated the necessity of cruelty, but to popularize the thesis about cruelty as an attribute of a strong person/romantic hero, many images in fiction were needed that corresponded to this thesis.

Thus, by the end of the 1930s, the stereotype that cruelty could be legitimate and socially approved had finally formed in the public consciousness. Although, since about the second half of the 18th century, attempts were made to prohibit cruelty within the framework of the Enlightenment (1740 – legislative prohibition on torture in Prussia, 1772 – prohibition on torture in Sweden, 1764 – a book by Cesare Beccaria, "*On Crimes and Punishments*", proposing to prohibit torture even for criminals). The romantic heroes of the 19th century brought back the fashion for cruelty, Nietzsche's philosophy also added legitimacy to this phenomenon, and then in the human rights sphere there was a kind of hiatus in the fight against torture, and the theme of fighting cruelty returned in 1948 in the "UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)" – (Article 5 proclaims that "no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment") and in the "European Convention on Human Rights" of 1950 (Article 3).

Twentieth-century philosophy has attempted to find a balance between the romantic poeticization of cruelty and the desire of human rights activists to strengthen human rights and freedoms (but for philosophers, the question remains debatable: does a person have the right to cruelty and can cruelty be justified to protect freedom?) Many philosophers have strongly criticized cruelty and violence (for example, Hannah Arendt in her works "The Banality of Evil", "On Violence", and "The Origins of Totalitarianism", Michel Foucault in "Discipline and Punish", Karl Popper in "Utopia and Violence"). But for some philosophers, the problem of cruelty did not have a unanimous answer: Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Georges Bataille reflected on the possibility of justifying cruelty or violence under certain conditions, in particular, if it is necessary for freedom, revolution, or self-affirmation.

The search for balance sometimes led to strange ambivalent constructions, as in the case of Jean-Paul Sartre. As Santoni (2013) notes, "Sartre came to realize that violence is at once freedom-affirming and freedom-destroying – a particularly uncomfortable situation for a philosopher of freedom with quasi-utopian social ideals".

In Jennifer Ang Mei Sze's (2010) "Sartre and the Moral Limits of War and Terrorism", she notes that Sartre did not consider violence legitimate, but he did consider it morally justifiable under certain conditions". The distinction is subtle but important: in "What is Literature?", Sartre simultaneously argues for the necessity of violence and the undesirability of violence:

But I do not mean to say that we must always oppose the use of violence, although I agree that violence in any form is a fall. But such a fall is inevitable because we exist in a world of violence. I agree that the use of vio-

lence against violence can perpetuate it. But one cannot but agree that it is the only means of stopping it. (Sartre, 1949)

Sartre also wants to clarify the limits of cruelty and more consistently exposes them in anthropological research, in which men are "condemned to freedom", but this freedom is accompanied by a sense of absurdity, loneliness, and existential responsibility for their actions. But in the context of colonial conflicts, especially during the Algerian War, Sartre justified violence as a tool for the struggle against colonial oppression. In his preface to Frantz Fanon's book *"The Wretched of the Earth"*, Sartre declared that the colonial system leaves oppressed peoples no choice but violent rebellion to gain their freedom. For Sartre, cruelty and violence in the liberation struggle were justified as a necessary step towards gaining autonomy, since the violence of the colonizers generates a violent response:

They would do well to read Fanon; for he shows clearly that this irrepressible violence is neither sound and fury, nor the resurrection of savage instincts, nor even the effect of resentment: it is man re-creating himself. I think we understood this truth at one time, but we have forgotten it – that no gentleness can efface the marks of violence; only violence itself can destroy them. (Sartre, 1961)

Exactly this thesis was the reason for the break in relations between Sartre and Camus, who were friends before the discovery of differences in views on violence. Camus largely follows the romantic line of worldview, proclaiming the need to rebel against the limits and pressure of society. But if Camus romanticizes cruelty in the context of self-destruction, then social cruelty, which is expressed in violence against other people, is unacceptable to him.

In his work *"The Rebel"* he analyzes the nature of revolutions and rebellions, emphasizing the importance of human solidarity and the rejection of totalitarianism and terror: "We are fighting for the distinction between sacrifice and mysticism, between energy and violence, between strength and cruelty" (Camus, 1951).

"Hatred and cruelty are in themselves fruitless," notes Camus (1951), who paints a rather unpleasant picture of a cruel world and calls for preserving true values in it: "And through the cries of the victims and the jubilant roar of cruelty, we tried to preserve in our hearts the memory of the gentle sea, of the unforgettable hill, of the smile of the beloved".

Camus (1951) is skeptical of the Romantic idea in recognizing cruelty as a sign of a strong person and notes that this thesis is best suited to justifying totalitarianism: "The power of totalitarian theocracies is cruel, but they, like the romantic Satan, justify their cruelty by saying that this power is not within everyone's power".

Camus saw the rebellion as a protest against the absurdity of life, but he strongly denied violence as a morally permissible means to achieve an end. For Camus, rebellion should not turn into unlimited violence, and he criticized both totalitarian regimes and radical revolutionaries for

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the fact that their struggles often led to new forms of cruelty. However, it cannot be considered that Camus completely breaks the tradition of romanticizing cruelty – in his discussions of suicide, the thesis is that cruelty towards oneself – self-destruction can be morally justified, or rather philosophically justified. Although Camus does not recognize it as the best solution:

The principle can be established that for a man who does not cheat, what he believes to be true must determine his actions. Belief in the absurdity of existence must then dictate his conduct. It is legitimate to wonder, clearly and without false pathos, whether a conclusion of this importance requires forsaking as rapidly as possible an incomprehensible condition?

(Camus, 1951)

Therefore, Camus can also be called "strangely ambivalent" in considering the problem of cruelty, where it is unacceptable, but in some cases morally justified (but not about other people).

The justification of cruelty towards oneself (suicide) is not the same as the propaganda of cruelty, because Camus calls for rebellion against the absurdity of the world, and he calls suicide the opposite strategy:

The mistaken idea that suicide follows rebellion, is its logical conclusion. Suicide is the complete opposite of rebellion since it presupposes consent. Like a leap, suicide is consent to one's limits. Everything is over, a person surrenders to the history that has been ordered to him; when he sees a terrible future ahead, he throws himself into it. (Camus, 1951)

Another perspective on the problem of cruelty is offered by Georges Bataille. In his works, such as "Erotism", Bataille (1986) sees cruelty as part of human nature, inseparable from the experience of freedom and individual transgression. In various ways, Freud, Lacan, Lorenz, and Fromm had previously recognized the ingrained nature of cruel instincts in human nature, but they viewed the problem of cruelty in the context that humanity should not be proud of it but must learn to regulate it, otherwise cruelty "strives endlessly for the destruction of the other as such" (Lacan, 1988). However, for Bataille, cruelty and violence can be an interesting part of the experience, allowing a person to transcend the boundaries of social norms and experience something radical, beyond everyday life. He saw cruelty as part of rituals and ecstatic practices that allow a person to go beyond the rational. Bataille (1957) explores experiments in cruelty in art precisely as an attempt to go beyond rational constraints, but he also notes the dangers of such searches: "Blake is the only one who has ventured as far as remained sane. Pure poets, who

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had no other lifeline connected with the world, Nietzsche and Hölderlin, above than their own poetry, have succumbed". Bataille does not justify cruelty in the traditional sense, but rather studies it as part of the extreme human experience.

Just as Kant once noted that lying is the greatest cruelty and the greatest violation of human dignity, Bataille (1957) also points out that cruelty is legitimized by our double standards: "We ironize the contradiction between war and the general prohibition condemning murder, but just like the prohibition, war is general in character".

The literary selection that became the subject of Bataille's (1957) study in "Literature and Evil" leads him to believe that "Truth and justice require balance, and yet they are always on the side of the cruel".

According to Bataille, cruelty is incompatible with "clear consciousness", but instead of thinking about how to establish the limits that were characteristic of psychoanalysis, Bataille (1957) suggests that: "Man is doomed to Evil, but must, if possible, not confine himself to the boundaries of reason", thus cruelty is considered not only as an act of physical violence but as a philosophical concept that concerns deeper existential and metaphysical questions.

The metaphysical side of cruelty in Bataille expresses the concept of "transgression", which consists in going beyond the boundaries of socially acceptable norms and taboos. According to Bataille, society is built on certain limitations that restrain human passions and desires. However, these limitations create tension, and their violation – through acts of cruelty or eroticism – allows a person to undergo an ecstatic experience when he encounters something greater than everyday existence.

Bataille also evaluates cruelty ambivalently: it can be destructive, but simultaneously opens up new horizons for knowing oneself and the world. He believed that through acts of violence or cruelty, a person approaches the border between life and death. In this experience, a person goes beyond the limits of everyday life and discovers new meanings.

Cruelty becomes not just a metaphysical, but even a sacred phenomenon: Bataille argues that cruel rituals, in particular sacrifice, play a central role in the formation of the sacred in human experience, where cruelty is the main instrument of spiritual and religious experience. Thus, cruelty seems to leave the ethical problem and enter the sphere of epistemology. As S. Bush (2012) aptly noted: "Bataille regards these experiences as absolutely authoritative, that is, one should not judge them by any standard external to the experience", that is, Bataille does not speak about the legitimacy and justification of cruelty from a moral viewpoint, but he talks about it as a way to gain new experience, and this experience cannot be obtained rationally, therefore, in a way, cruelty becomes justified, as the only opportunity to expand the boundaries of one's knowledge. However, one can also find in Bataille's (1957) attempts at a moral, and not only cognitive, justification of cruelty, through the opposition of romantic cruelty and the utilitarianism of capitalist society, and reflections on the need for heterogeneity: "The very term heterogeneous," Bataille (1978) writes in 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism', "indicates that it concerns elements which are impossible to assimilate".

As A. Evangelou (2010) notes: "According to Bataille, those who strive for the experience of human wholeness and freedom need to recognize and accept the inhomogeneous, heterogeneous element in existence. The realm of the heterogeneous contains what is conventionally classified as base, filthy, and dangerous". In various works, Bataille cited excrement, sweat, menstrual blood, semen, vomit, deviant sexual acts, madness, cannibalism, sacrifices, squandering, crimes, violence, etc. as examples of the heterogeneous. In short, the term heterogeneous encompasses

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all social phenomena characterized by "violence, excess, delirium, madness" (Bataille, 1978). Acknowledgement of the heterogeneous therefore implies not only tolerating but also perceiving it and living it as necessary. Only then is the commonly valued aspect of life (beautiful, good, pure etc.) justified: "I love purity to the point of loving impurity; without it purity would be a fraud" (Bataille, 1978).

One example of such heterogeneity is Bataille's interpretation of the phenomenon of love: in his book *"Eroticism"*, Bataille explores how erotic practices often contain elements of violence or cruelty since they are associated with the violation of prohibitions and social norms. Eroticism, in his opinion, carries with it an experience of the destruction of individuality, which is similar to the experience of death. Cruelty in this context acts as a means of destroying the boundaries between the subject and the world, the individual and the collective, life and death. The hero Heathcliff in the novel *"Wuthering Heights"* by Emilia Bronte best illustrates the "heterogeneity" of love, in which it is capable of boundless cruelty (when Bataille (1957) analyzes this novel, he does not estimate that Heathcliff is a worthy character and does not justify his behavior, but calls this story "surely the most beautiful and most profoundly violent love story").

Thus, according to Bataille (1978), the recognition of cruelty contributes to the self-awareness of integrity and freedom and contributes to the understanding of the fullness of love, but Bataille condemns cruelty in political terms – he gives the image of the Sovereign, who "does not recognize any restrictions in his actions and is completely self-sufficient in his destructiveness". Dorchain (2022) notes that such an understanding emphasizes the dehumanization of such a government, where the attitude towards people "is reduced to the attitude towards bodies".

Although it is Bataille who has been most often criticized for justifying cruelty and violence (especially Breton), his concept is also ambivalent – it justifies cognitive cruelty (the ecstatic experience of knowledge through cruel rituals) and ontological cruelty (the recognition of the heterogeneity of the universe), but it does not justify social and political cruelty: cruelty as an instrument of controlling society is perceived by him as unacceptable.

Originality

The problem of the ambivalent interpretation of cruelty, which is most vividly presented in the works of Camus, Sartre, and Bataille, as a result of the research, allowed us to identify three lines in justification of cruelty, which are characteristic of the philosophy of the twentieth century:

1. Cruelty in the fight against social injustice, in particular in the liberation struggle. This line was initiated by Fanon and Sartre, and it is most vulnerable to manipulation. In matters of cruelty and inhuman treatment, such theses can be used as a justification for tortures and ill-treatment – for example, similar explanations are now put forward by the terrorist organization Hamas, which tortures prisoners and justifies this by the "struggle for justice" that they allegedly wage.

2. Cruelty towards oneself can be a moral right of a person, arising from his/her freedom. Camus substantiated this line, while emphasizing that he would not support and promote self-destruction, but recognizes it as a human right. The question is very debatable, because, in addition to ordinary suicide, a similar problem arises in the case of euthanasia, when staying alive for a person is crueler than ending suffering and dying. Camus calls for rebellion against the absurdity of the world, and suicide for him is synonymous with submission and agreement with one's own limits, so he considers such a way out not the best and calls for fighting, although he leaves a person the right to self-destruction.

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3. Cruelty as "expanding the boundaries of knowledge." According to Bataille, non-rational practices of knowledge become necessary because the world has a heterogeneous nature, it is not completely rational, but contains many elements that are unpleasant, ugly, or evil. We cannot cognize them with the help of reason (because they are not rational), so ecstatic cruel practices are the best way. Thus, Bataille considers cruelty in a cognitive, ontological and political aspect, while we observe elements of justification of cruelty in the cognitive and ontological sense, but it is not present in the political. Bataille's philosophy does not offer a "justification" of cruelty in the traditional sense, where this phenomenon would be perceived as morally acceptable. Rather, he explores it as a necessary part of human existence, which reflects the deep contradictions of human nature. Cruelty for Bataille is an element of transcendent experience, which helps people to know the limits of being, overcome limitations, and plunge into the sacred, although this process can be painful and destructive. Such a line of legitimization of cruelty opens up space for manipulation (for example, it can be used as a justification for sacrifices to obtain mystical experiences), thus it is one of the examples of romanticizing of cruelty, which can become very harmful.

Conclusions

Thus, in the philosophy of the 20th century, the issue of cruelty and violence was considered from different perspectives – from struggle to ambivalent justification. None of the above philosophers directly called for cruelty but left the possibility of interpreting their concept in the direction of tolerating cruelty. This returns to the vision of the problem of cruelty that human rights activists fought against: they demanded to limit cruelty in any case, while their opponents tried to justify the need to leave cruelty for a good purpose (maintaining law and order, fighting for social justice, punishing the guilty). The main achievement of human rights activists today, which should be supported by philosophers: "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" (United Nations, 1948), and at the same time any ambivalent interpretation of cruelty to other people threatens fundamental human rights and freedoms.

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Межі толерування жорстокості у філософії ХХ століття: можливість амбівалентної інтерпретації

Мета. Дослідження спрямовано на амбівалентні інтерпретації меж толерування жорстокості у філософії ХХ століття. **Теоретичний базис.** Основою дослідження стали концепції Жана-Поля Сартра, Жоржа Батая та Альбера Камю, які не виправдовують жорстокість, але показують можливість її легітимності за деяких умов. **Наукова новизна.** Автори встановили три головні лінії толерування жорстокості, які стали основою амбівалентної інтерпретації: 1) обґрунтування необхідності жорстокості в боротьбі за соціальну справедливість (Сартр); 2) обґрунтування можливості жорстокості щодо себе як наслідок прав та свобод людини (Камю); 3) обґрунтування доцільності гносеологічної жорстокості як засобу, який розширює кордони пізнання (Батай). **Висновки.** Амбівалентна інтерпретація жорстокості, характерна для Ж. Батая, А. Камю та Ж.-П. Сартра, розвиває межі толерування жорстокості і відкриває простір для маніпуляцій, які можуть порушити права та свободи людей. Якщо концепція А. Камю попри дискусивність залишається в межах поваги до людської гідності, то в інтерпретації Ж.-П. Сартра людина, незважаючи на права та свободи, які декларує філософ, може сприйматися лише як інструмент для соціальної боротьби, а в Ж. Батая – як можливість отримати новий екстатичний досвід шляхом жорстокого поводження з іншими.

Ключові слова: жорстокість; насильство; права людини; сучасна філософія; Ж. Батай; Ж.-П. Сартр; А. Камю

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