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# Violence and Civility:
# On the Limits of Political Anthropology

*T*his essay extends the arguments of some of the work that I have already devoted to the theme of the relationships between violence and politics, understood as "civility."[1] I am working toward an encounter to which many thinkers are inclined but that we do not wish to base on a misunderstanding. I articulate my propositions around three points whose lineage I will illuminate while conferring on them the systematicity required for purposes of *seeking* the problematic unity of materials in no sense susceptible to any definitive resolution. These points concern:

1) The phenomenology of extreme violence that—on the basis of the contemporary manifestations in which we find ourselves located or of which we are the "spectators," manifestations that are also connected to the inquiries that have defined political anthropology since its emergence—obliges us to reconsider the very conditions of the possibility of a political action;

2) The need to criticize or even deconstruct the negative categories—evil, violence, death—that seem to govern the articulation of ethics, anthropology, and politics; and

3)    The dilemmas (which, like other scholars, I take the liberty of calling *tragic*) that we are exposed to by the need to politically transform the existing state of things—characterized by structural and circumstantial violence—though we can renounce neither the struggle for emancipation nor resistance (interior or exterior) to the nihilism of violence, or what could be called, in a manner of speaking, the necessity of civility.

It is necessary to begin by elucidating the meaning of the expression "extreme violence," and to do so according to the mode of comprehending its typical aspects or essential traits, which is to say, by proposing its phenomenology, even if this remains schematic.[2] However, it is not only a matter of describing the way in which extreme violence is *lived*, but more generally the way in which it is distributed between the poles of the individual and the collective, or of the subjective and the objective. This principle also governs the lived experiences that we can agree to consider, according to different modalities, as limit experiences, taking the human being to the limit of the possibility of instruction, interpretation, reaction, and transformation. Because these modalities imply the calling into question of personal and social identity, they necessarily call into question the integrity of the body and of the mind, as well as the mutual link of belonging between subjects and their historical and geographic environment.[3] This inquiry bears on the way in which individuality is connected to habitations or workplaces and is, as a result, constructed in space, just as it relies on nearby or "imagined" communities and is consequently constructed in a time that always surpasses itself because it includes the succession of generations, but on which it nevertheless must be founded.

Such a description can be related to the notion of the *state of exception* as discussed so brilliantly by Agamben in his generalization of the concentration or death camps. This paradigm, he argues in *Homo Sacer*, produces that which institutions of social, political, and cultural existence normally seek to conceal and keep at a distance: the absolute fragility, the absolute dispensability, of "bare life," the dimension of animality at the human world's very core—and therefore also the destruction of the social tie by society itself. But while recognizing the strength of this conceptualization and the fundamental problems that it allows us to pose, it is worth beginning with a phenomenology that is more diversified and in a sense less allegorical, one that would necessarily make visible one of the characteristic traits of what we understand today as extreme violence,

and the reasons why it is so difficult to offer a simple interpretation: I mean the fundamentally *heterogeneous* character of such violence. It is through this heterogeneity that we must try to rediscover a set of traits revealing the persistence of an identical ethical and anthropological question.

Extreme violence is by definition an uneasy, even paradoxical, notion. It indicates a threshold or a markable limit in things themselves. At the same time, it is exposed to absolute criteria and quantitative estimations. There is extreme violence in such mass phenomena as extermination or genocide, enslavement, the displacement of populations, the massive assorted pauperizations that arise from vulnerability to "natural catastrophes," famines, and epidemics (with regard to which we speak precisely of thresholds of survival). But there is also extreme violence in the administration of physical or moral suffering that is strictly individual, of wounds directed against bodily integrity or self-respect, that is, against the possibility of defending and insuring one's own *dignity*. The reference to the singular individual can no more be avoided than the reference to generic social situations, because the life that supports the experience of uniquely human activities—language, work, sexuality, generation, education—along with the life that supports the rights said to be human or civil, is in the last analysis an individual, or *individuable* (which is not to say *isolatable*), life.

This phenomenology consists also of other elements of complexity. There is extreme violence in the brutality and suddenness of traumatic events, catastrophes that bring death, displacement, subjection to the power of a master. But there is also extreme violence in the indefinite repetition of certain habitual dominations at the invisible or indiscernible limit of violence because, it seems, they are part of the very foundations of society or culture. One thinks, of course, in particular of the subordination and domestic slavery of women or, in certain correlative exclusions, of the manner in which the normality of morals is instituted, of the measured utility of human beings. (I have in mind the exclusion of lunatics, criminals, and sexual deviants, for whom an always present savagery manifests itself publicly on the occasion of certain scandals but that otherwise remains all the more hidden because no one wants to see it, and whose genealogy Michel Foucault has reconstructed as coextensive with the history of modernity.)[4] From this extreme diversity—which we must avoid simplifying and whose moments of convergence we must try to understand—I intend to extract a certain number of traits. To do so, I will keep in view the means by which these traits affect the problem of

political action, itself conceived as a fundamental mode—at once mate-rial and symbolic—of instituting the reciprocal relation of individuals and the communities constituted by them. This is a matter of collectivizing individuals and individualizing the members of historical collectives.

To locate qualitatively what we call "extreme" in the register of violence is not to proceed to typologies or descriptions in the juridi-cal sense, even given the development of jurisprudence and particularly the evolution of its definitions (for example, when it criminalizes rape or genocide). Rather, it is to problematize the very notion of threshold, above all because violence as such cannot be the object of undifferenti-ated anathema. Such anathema is vain; it would immediately mask, in the form of denial, that anthropologically fundamental fact that violence in its diverse forms (I would even say the social invention of diverse forms of violence), its very "creativity," pertains both to human experience and to history, of which it constitutes one of the "motors." Because violence and politics, violence and aesthetics, violence and moral experiences, and so on are inextricably associated, we feel the need to locate those thresholds associated with the idea of the intolerable. We place such thresholds in relation to a legal limit of the very possibility of politics. We might thus consider *thresholds of the intolerable* as manifestations of the *element of inhumanity* without which even the idea of *humanity* is meaningless.

I believe that this limit is tentatively reached when brutally or insidiously manifest, by means visible or invisible, through three instances that invert the "transindividual" conditions of individual and social exis-tence. They are human beings' resistance to death and servitude; the complementarity of life and death (or the place of death in life); and the finality or utility of the use of force and constraint.

The meaning of violence as the annihilation of the possibili-ties of resistance is illustrated in inimitable fashion by Simone Weil in her commentary on Homer's *Iliad*, in which she isolates, in the speech of the poet, three characteristics whose interweaving founds a tragic vision of the world: the reduction of the conquered to the state of a powerless "thing" at the moment of violent death; the illusion of total power, which passes from one side to another in war and deprives the actor of the occasion he had of escaping his own destiny; and finally the moral equity that makes one feel the suffering of the enemy as one's own. It is the first aspect that, without forgetting the others, concerns us here:

*Force is that which makes a thing of whoever submits to it. Exercised to the extreme, it makes the human being a thing quite literally, that is, a dead body [. . .]. The hero is a thing dragged in the dust behind a chariot [. . .]. The force that kills is summary and crude. How much more varied in operation, how much more stunning in effect is that other sort of force, that which does not kill, or rather does not kill just yet. It will kill for a certainty, or it will kill perhaps, or it may merely hang over the being it can kill at any instant; in all cases, it changes the human being into stone. From the power to change a human being into a thing by making him die there comes another power, in its way more momentous, that of making a still living being into a thing. He is living, he has a soul; he is nonetheless a thing. Strange being—a thing with a soul; strange situation for the soul! Who can say how it must each moment conform itself, twist and contort itself? It was not created to inhabit a thing; when it compels itself to do so, it endures violence through and through. A man disarmed and exposed, toward whom a weapon points, becomes a corpse before being touched [. . .]. At least some suppliants, once granted their wish, become again men like others. But there are still more miserable beings who, without dying, have become things for life. In their days there is no play, no space, no opening for anything that comes from within. These are not men living harder lives than others, or socially inferior to others; they are an alternative human species, a hybrid of man and corpse. That a human being should be a thing is a logical contradiction; but when the impossible has become a reality, the contradiction lacerates the soul. This thing aspires at all times to be a man or a woman, and never attains the goal. This is a death that extends throughout a life, a life that death has frozen long before putting an end to it. (45–49)*

To say that the extremity of violence annihilates the possibilities of resistance, in whatever form, is to say that it does not contribute to any dialectic, not even that which Hegel had in mind. In his famous discourse regarding "independence and dependence of self-consciousness" (more commonly known as the "master-slave dialectic"), Hegel described the possibility of an "exchange" between submission and life, making it the origin of cultural development. To negate that possibility is also to annihilate a certain

complementarity of life and death that is itself at the foundation of the linkage of generations and the formation of communities. Here, of course, we rediscover something very close to what Agamben calls the production of "bare life," that is to say, when life appears finally as worse than death.

The fact that life can become worse than death, or more difficult to live than death itself, is traditionally related to the experience of torture and therefore to a threshold of intensity and a "refinement" of the experience of suffering that drive the tortured to beg for death as a deliverance. But the fact that life can become worse than death can also refer to a quantity or continuity of violence that makes it appear interminable, like a fate or an end in itself. Achille Mbembe placed the center of his "phenomenology of violence" in the realm of the colony and what succeeds it—neither independence, nor liberty, but the "postcolony." He formulates this succession as the multiplication of death—multiplication of death not only in the sense that innumerable murders, direct and indirect, are inherent in colonization for as long as it is maintained and survives in the postcolonial world that has inherited the techniques of power, but also in the sense that each death is in some way slowed, differentiated, and extended to an infinite degree. Thus emerges the "living dead" (a notion that we encounter at the heart of Arendt's work), whose flesh (as Weil has also said) becomes meat. The colony is

> *a place where life and death are so entangled that it is no longer possible to distinguish them, or to say what is on the side of the shadow or its obverse: "Is that man still alive, or dead?" [. . .] What death does one die "after the colony"? "There are so many deaths. One no longer knows which one to die." For there are not only several sorts of deaths. There are also several forms of dying. [. . .] Every recipe is tried out on [the tortured prisoner's] body [. . .]. There are some, placed in a sort of non-place, who do not know whether they are alive or whether they are condemned. [. . .] Then there is death by stages. Fifteen stages, for example, "a death multiplied by fifteen." [. . .] But is not a death multiplied by fifteen, finally equal to a single death? [. . .] Even more, there is that other form of dying, which can be read in the landscape, in the shadow of abandoned worksites, rubbish bins, and street corners, digging gashes in the belly of inhabited space. (Mbembe 197–99)*

Mbembe describes the conditions of the postcolony in the succession of genocides without reason or end.

This multiplication of death is placed in relation, on the one hand, to the annulment or annihilation of the existence of those dominated by colonization—which denies to "the indigenous" any culture or sociability or even individuality (the "Arabs," the "Negroes," the "coolies" are indiscernible)—and on the other, to the obsession with *animality* that transforms the native into prey. As suggested by Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* and described by Frantz Fanon, colonization by extreme violence cannot be maintained without its permanent haunting by prey that becomes in its turn the hunter—which implies that terror can never be abandoned. It is precisely in relation to the elimination of resistance and the reduction to helplessness that Derrida risks the provocative comparison between genocide and cruelty to animals.[5]

Let us not forget that the possibility of experiencing life as less bearable than death belongs also in a sense to the "normality" of human existence. More exactly, this possibility marks the limit-presence of a pathology, notably of sickness or infirmity, even within the norm, from which proceeds the moral experiences and ethical choices that are the most contradictory (the stoic choice of suicide against degeneration, the Christian acceptance of suffering that constitutes a form of identification with the Passion of the Savior). This in turn leads us to another modality of the annihilation of the complementarity between life and death necessary to life itself: when individuals are found radically dispossessed of their own death. Death in any case does not truly belong to them, but they never cease, through narrative, ritual, or imagination, to construct fictions that render it to them as a kind of property. Such dispossession can be produced according to diverse modalities of the interruption of culture, from radical solitude or isolated death, without help or witness, up to industrial, anonymous death administered en masse.

This brings us to a third modality of extreme violence, which Hannah Arendt emphasizes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* as a counterpoint to her description of the totalitarian terror that begins by disposing of the bodies of victims intended for mass extermination through a triple annihilation of their humanity as legal personality, moral personality, and differentiated individuality.[6] The minute preparations for elimination that required an entire juridical apparatus, along with a technical rationality and total organization, are without social utility, or their utility is precisely antisocial, a radical inutility. Violence appears, in part at least, as

exceeding the finalities that assure it a permanent place in the economy of power and production. In her analysis of the meaning of the camps, Arendt devoted herself to proving that in spite of appearances, or precisely because of the industrial forms and the simulacrum of bureaucratic rationality that characterize them, they fulfilled no economic function (even in the context of the war economy), but comprised on the contrary a way of wasting resources in both the Nazi and Soviet cases. And this counterfinality, far from becoming weakened by the demands of self-preservation, tends rather to annul them: it is thus that the Nazis, as their defeat approached, devoted increasing forces and resources to putting into practice the "final solution" that was their real work (*leur propre oeuvre*), to the detriment of national defense. This madness must be related to the fact that the camps and more generally terror have no other function than to reproduce, attest to, and justify the omnipotence of those who instituted them.

This characteristic, which could be discussed further,[7] is not lacking in ethical ambivalence—as one can see by contrasting it with Georges Bataille's notion of expenditure; rather, it extends to the entire spectrum of all the forms of violence considered extreme: whether it is a matter of breaking the will of the slave or of obtaining information by torture, isolation, the deprivation of rights and contact, as one sees at Guantánamo; or when it is a matter of seizing military advantage through terror, as in state terror and "suicide bombers" who "respond" to it in the Middle East and elsewhere. In reality, what is in question here is knowing if the exercise of violence is ever fundamentally functional, if it can truly exist without an excess proper to it—that is, without going to extremes and escaping the intentions and the control of its own agents. As a problematic, however, I believe we can retain the distinction between extreme violence, the means that it employs or the effects that it produces, and the *Zweckrationalität*, the rationality of the means-ends relationship. Hypothetically, we can perceive a correlation between the fantasy of omnipotence on which extreme violence feeds and that it reproduces and the reduction of its victims to powerlessness, which constitutes its immanent objective.

The circle thus constituted encloses not only the modalities of death's deceleration or excess but also a supplementary dimension (perhaps the properly tragic dimension) of victims' contamination by the very violence of which they are the object. It is in relation to the Nazi death camps in particular that this question has been raised in the contemporary period, though not without occasioning conflicts and polemics. It can hardly be otherwise in a "gray zone," as Primo Levi put it, where the

necessity of telling the truth carries at every instant the risk of an infamy that erases the distinction between executioners and victims—all the more so as certain developments, inspired by the aesthetics of transgression, have inverted their place or their value, realizing retroactively one of the objectives of terror. In this light, we must reread the debates on the "passivity" of the victims of genocides (including the Jewish genocide) that haunt survivors and their descendants. The impossibility of resistance—that is, of the response, of the proportionate response, or finally, a political response—to violence involves a number of distinct modalities: they include not only silence, which is perhaps the fundamental modality,[8] but also the counterviolence called suicidal that is at the limit of helplessness and the illusion of omnipotence and that, in fact, duplicates that limit. Eventually, mutual helplessness, an apparently paradoxical notion evoked in Marx's forgotten statement in *The Communist Manifesto* concerning the "mutual destruction of contending classes" at certain historical conjunctures, and in consequence the annihilation of politics itself, finds its highest pitch at the moment when, using the threat of death or torture, the executioners and more generally the "masters" make the victims, or certain of the victims, the (eventually zealous) instruments of the annihilation, subjection, and abjection of their intimates.

This brings to mind Levi's description of the functionality of the *Sonderkommandos* of Auschwitz and the scene in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* where the latter succeeds (not without a form of "sadism of truth") in making a barber in Tel Aviv relive the moment when he had to prepare his wife and daughter for the gas chamber. Levi writes:

> *Conceiving and organizing the squads [of* Sonderkommandos*] was National Socialism's most demonic crime. Behind the pragmatic aspect (to economize on able men, to impose on others the most atrocious tasks) other more subtle aspects can be perceived. This institution represented an attempt to shift onto others—specifically, the victims—the burden of guilt, so that they were deprived of even the solace of innocence. It is neither easy nor agreeable to dredge this abyss of viciousness, and yet I think it must be done, because what could be perpetrated yesterday could be attempted again tomorrow [. . .]. In fact, the existence of the squads had a meaning, a message: "We, the master race, are your destroyers, but you are no better than we are; if we so wish, and we do wish, we can destroy not only your bodies but also your souls, just as we have destroyed ours." (53–54)*

Levi then offers the anecdote of a soccer match organized in the camps between a team of ss and a team of members of the *Sonderkommando* (themselves to be eliminated as periodic replacements arrived), illustrating "the foul link of imposed complicity" and begging symbolic interpretation:

> *Nothing of this kind ever took place, nor would it have been conceivable, with other categories of prisoners; but with them, with the "crematorium ravens," the ss could enter the field on equal footing, or almost. Behind this armistice one hears satanic laughter: it is consummated, we have succeeded, you no longer are the other race, the anti-race, the prime enemy of the millennial Reich; you are no longer the people who reject idols. We have embraced you, corrupted you, dragged you to the bottom with us. You are like us, you proud people: dirtied with your own blood, as we are. You too, like us and like Cain, have killed the brother. Come, we can play together. (55)*

In the same vein, Zygmunt Bauman, in *Modernity and the Holocaust*, inscribes the essential moment of extreme violence arriving at its limit in a rational perspective that makes extermination the fulfillment of modernity:

> *ss administration transformed everything which had come into its orbit—including its victims—into an integral part of the chain of command, an area subject to the strictly disciplinary rules and freed from moral judgment. The genocide was a composite process; as Hilberg observed, it included things done by the Germans, and things done—on German orders, yet often with dedication verging on self-abandonment—by their Jewish victims. This is the technical superiority of a purposefully designed, rationally organized mass murder over riotous outbursts of orgy killing. Co-operation of the victims with the perpetrators of a pogrom is inconceivable. The victims' co-operation with the bureaucrats of the ss was part of the design: indeed, it was a crucial condition of its success. [. . .] Hence not only the external articulations of the ghetto setting, on which the victims had no control, were manipulated so as to transform the ghetto as a whole into an extension of the murdering machine; also the rational faculties of the "functionaries" of that extension were deployed for the elicitation of behavior motivated by loyalty and co-operation with the bureaucratically defined ends. (22–23)*

One might ask, in spite of experience, whether we ever arrive at these complementary limits that also represent different avenues of turning the human against itself, a crucial question for the very possibility of politics.

In a world and a history irreparably marked by the existence of relationships of domination and violence, the possibility of politics is essentially bound up with practices of resistance, not only negatively, as the contestation of the established order, the demand for justice, and so on, but also positively, as a place where active subjectivities and collective solidarities are formed. What is proper to extreme violence, however, is its tendency to obliterate that possibility, as it reduces individuals and groups to helplessness under its different forms, to which different forms of violence and suicidal counterviolence comprise equal counterparts. That question has not ceased to occupy certain philosophers—in particular Spinoza. Although he sketched out a description of domination in terms of the effects of absolute monarchy on the capacity of individuals to preserve their survival instincts, Spinoza did not rule out the possibility of resistance in the absolute. The phenomenology of violence that Spinoza proposes to us (and on which Deleuze has particularly insisted)[9] involves the idea that individuality consists (for so long as it survives) of an *incompressible minimum* that extreme violence cannot annihilate or turn back against the effort to live and to think as individuals, in the conscious or especially unconscious form of a voluntary servitude that may be also a will to self-sacrifice. This idea is not at all the same as the Hegelian idea (in the last analysis, an idea of Christian origin) according to which extreme violence can be converted into ethical, legal, and political progress by the power of the negative. It is all the more interesting that this idea rests on the thesis of the *transindividual* character of individuality itself, that is to say, on the idea that what creates the capacity for resistance to violence in individuals, and simply constitutes their "being," is the set of relations that they always maintain with other individuals, who are a part of them as they themselves are a part of the being of others.[10] With the capacity for resistance that marks the power to live come the capacities for speech, for claiming "rights," for fighting for one's own interest, and for the emancipation of humankind. This idea is also always ideally designated by the system of cruelty, which shows it to pose a fundamental anthropological and political problem, the same problem on which depends the possibility of a political anthropology, as I am tempted to call it.

An entire segment of contemporary philosophy has responded to this problem by reactivating the question of *evil* through the articulation

of the ethical and the political. According to Spinoza (who carefully employs the traditional name of ethics to designate the theoretical field in which the possibility of politics can be "deduced" from general conditions of individuality as the set of relations and conflicts, passivity and activity), the idea of an incompressible minimum, and consequently of a capacity for resistance to violence by the individual (in particular the idea that one cannot prevent a man from thinking), is narrowly bound to two theses that we will evidently be obliged to problematize. In that we cannot take them as given, we must discuss their presuppositions. It is said, against the dominant current of contractualism (and notably against Hobbes), that there is *no nature* that can be opposed to the history of institutions and to politics, or more generally, that is not *inside* the political. There is therefore no foundation for the differences between the forms of society and regimes, other than the different economies of forces that are exercised in them. The other thesis holds that the notion of evil is imaginary in that it corresponds only to the manner in which individuals "conscious of their desires and ignorant of the causes that determine them" (Spinoza 73) represent to themselves the powers that get in the way of their interest and preservation and therefore destroy them—that is, in the last analysis, death, which is evil par excellence because it corresponds to the definitive isolation of the individual in relation to his fellows. That is to say, one can kill or be killed by others, but one always dies alone, or "for oneself" (*pour soi-même*). Even if we do not conserve it as such, this thesis has the great advantage of posing the ethical problem in proximity to the limits arising from the phenomenology of extreme violence.

The critique of the reference to evil, however, can be pursued according to completely different modalities. It has recently been vigorously reexamined by Alain Badiou in a small work titled *Ethics* that appears to refer to Spinoza, but in fact has a rather Platonic orientation. Based explicitly on references to Levinas but having in mind a larger current of the philosophical defense of the "rights of man" and the "rights of the living" from the identification and the denunciation of Evil as what politics and more generally human action must escape and render impossible,[11] Badiou seeks to show from a half-demonstrative, half-axiomatic technique that ethics and politics (and therefore their articulation) must be founded not on the primacy of the reference to Evil, in a negative sense, but positively on the reference to Good that, according to a tradition that leads from Plato to Thomas Aquinas (even if he proposes, technically, a different and

even antithetical definition), he identifies with Truth.[12] This critique develops along two axes that are not, in effect, completely removed from certain themes of Spinozism: on the one hand, the idea that the ethical position (and along those lines, political consequence) founded upon the primacy of the idea of Evil (or of radical Evil) is indissociable from an obsession with death and therefore a nihilistic surrender to the death drive at the very moment that this obsession battles its manifestations (34);[15] on the other hand, the idea that Evil is an abstract generality founded on the power (and, if the case arises, the manipulation) of the analogies that permit the constitution of "the enemies" of humankind through assimilation to the archetypal figures of the inhuman (thus the use of the name *Hitler* and the reference to the Holocaust to identify new incarnations of Evil, such as Islam) (61).[14] Such a discourse proceeds by a term-by-term inversion at the interior of the metaphysical pair of Good and Evil (proclaiming the superiority of the ethics of Good over the ethics of Evil despite the fact that Spinoza, it may be recalled, considered them to be rigorously inseparable, although not synonymous) or even by a *reversal of the reversal* (if we recognize that the ethics of radical Evil, before and after Kant, is a necessary consequence of the destruction of the Idea of sovereign Good, from which it extracts the true principle of universality, or immortality of truths). Such a discourse proves to be literally obsessed with the threat of different forms of Evil from which it had inferred the negative existence of Good: above all, the "simulacra" formally indiscernible from the truth, in which it mimes the character and power of the destruction of the established order that engenders subjective fidelity (the prime example of this "disaster" being again Nazism, as "counterrevolutionary revolution"), but also, as with the condition of the possibility of illusion, the general reign of opinion, itself founded on negative generalities such as "egoism," the "power of money" (or of the market), "communitarianism," and so on. The idea of an ethics of Good proves to be therefore indiscernible from the idea that, apart from rare exceptions (the rarity of founding events, the rarity of loyalty without betrayal, etc.), human beings live in the world of Evil, or to a lesser extent a world of the perversion of Good. This brings us back to my point of departure, namely, the *indistinction* of the figures of the negative. Now it is precisely here that it is necessary to face up to the question posed by Spinoza and, in an inverse sense, by the contemporary phenomenology of extreme violence and the limits of the collective political capacity—or if one wishes, of the "impolitic" limits of politics.[15]

In reality, most contemporary reflections on extreme violence are not organized around an indifferent or metaphysical notion of absolute evil (even if they have to rethink its meaning, in particular in the vein of Kantian or post-Kantian theories of the perversion of liberty, or of the Nietzschean theory of nihilism). On the contrary, most contemporary reflections on extreme violence are a function of the specifically modern problem of the relations between the destruction of politics and the destruction of the human as correlative aspects of the same essential productivity.

Is it necessary to speak here of the destruction of politics, or rather, of the essence of politics? In order to examine this question, I have proposed elsewhere[16] that we proceed along the two axes of a structure founded on the intersection of two modalities of the destruction of action: that which I call "ultra-objective," reducing human beings to the status of things to be eliminated or instrumentalized at the will of the world of commodities, and that which I call "ultra-subjective," making individuals and communities prey to the delirium of the sovereign power, the executors of a plan to liquidate the forces of evil. It is not so much a question of a structure of causes having an explanatory function, I would argue, as of a structure of observable effects whose cause (in every case the principal, ultimate cause) is absent. It therefore serves not so much to rationally classify and explain the forms of extreme violence historically by reducing their essential heterogeneity but rather to interpret their overdetermination by approaching from various sides simultaneously the limit of discourse and metaphor, or the critical points of our experience where the "measure/moderation" transforms itself into "immoderation/excess," homogeneity into heterogeneity (Bataille), and relation (including the relation of forces) into *nonrelation* through the disappearance or absolution of the face of the adversary as such.[17]

Accounting for extreme violence and its specific effect of destroying the conditions of political possibility (to begin by the same possibility of battle or of the *agon*) raises the most difficult anthropological questions. Such an account appears to be closely linked to the possibility of dissociating, at least relatively, a notion of history and historicity from the eschatological or apocalyptic notion of the "ends of man." Because what is at stake is the coexistence—at the limit, the indiscernability—of *the production of man by man* (that is to say, by society and culture) and *the destruction of man by man* in the very forms and institutions of humanization (as illustrated not only by scientifically planned and industrialized genocides, but also by the teaching of hatred). One can approach this

question through a variety of themes that have acquired great importance in contemporary philosophy.

*Radical evil* is one of these themes. It is clear that Arendt always links it, in a post-Kantian terminology, to the annihilation of "spontaneity," or in other words, simultaneously to the capacity for judgment and to the capacity for resistance. But radical evil is actually also an effect of the set of transgressions that tend to blur distinctions between subject and object, between executioner and victim—in short, between activity and passivity—and institute what Levi called "the gray zone." I interpret this not so much as a confusion of the roles of executioner and victim but as the emergence of a question (in fact indeterminable) that extends to the place of the inhuman in the human (or in the human species). Among the executioners and the victims, or the users and the used, who has become the equivalent of a beast, or a machine?

Another theme associated with the idea of a destructive production rests—in Adorno and the Frankfurt School generally—on economists' inversion of what comprises industrial rationality, which includes the idea of productive destruction and, by extension, history in general. This returns us to Arendt's reflections on the dis-utility of camps and on totalitarian institutions in general—in sum, the other face of the idea of radical evil, by which she takes us beyond the Kantian meaning invested with theological presuppositions of the "perversion of will" to the "diabolical" inversion of the same idea of law that Kant had so neatly separated from it. This law is at the foundation of the problem that treats the "banality of evil" as disinterested obedience to a law of destruction of the human conditions of life. This law presents itself, therefore, as the categorical imperative of collective dehumanization whose source is also anonymous.[18]

Above all, one should bring a similar principle to bear on the anthropological limit of what Jacques Derrida proposed to call *the beyond of the death drive*. If I understand it, what he means by this phrase is the disassociation of its tension or its constitutive unity of opposites, which invokes at once the power of the destruction or distortion of life and the power of the protection of the living individual against his or her instrumentalization by the process of the perpetuation of generic life, to allow the drive for mastery or control (*Bemachtigungstrieb*) that Derrida associates with the principle of sovereignty. Here, one is no longer in the realm of a psychological analogy to an evil will or human viciousness, but is, rather, proceeding on the hypothesis of a turn against life itself, of its constitutive association with death, a turn that reverses the function of the defense

of the ego or of individuality as limitless appropriation—including, and above all, self-appropriation.[19] I would say here that we have escaped from psychology, but of course, as Freud himself said, we dwell on the extremely uneasy border between psychology and metaphysics, between empirical and speculative ways of referring to the idea of human nature. That we cannot use a Hobbesian war of all against all or a Darwinian principle of natural selection to assimilate the idea of the death drive and its beyond, or limit, in political interpretation returns us to the question of the anthropological status of extreme violence with its aporetic status highlighted. A phenomenology of the modalities of human existence that bring about extreme violence seeks limit-experiences, or rather questions the conditions of possibility and impossibility of these modalities. But such a phenomenology also tends to erase the received distinctions, normal and normative, between nature and history, nature and politics, humanity and inhumanity.

How, then, can we attempt to reformulate the objectives of politics by taking into account their constitutive limit, a limit internal to it that is not imposed by circumstances alone? It is only by assuming the irreducible complexity of such a limit that we keep from confining it to a single political category, even if the categories of politics we invoke are situated in a necessary proximity. Proximity necessarily implies tension.

I have in mind the tension that exists between the notions—very close etymologically—of citizenship and civility, which I have examined elsewhere.[20] I would go so far as to say that these notions are contraries, but I would still ask if the two cannot presuppose each other in a historically uninterrupted process. "Modern" citizenship—of which we are the products and to a certain extent the actors—is in principle universal, even when instituted within borders (tomorrow, perhaps, across borders?). This is why modern citizenship can assume only the paradoxical form of a "community without community," without a substantial location, without a natural or supernatural origin. Such citizenship can be only the immanent, collective construction of the reciprocity of rights, simultaneously invalidating the forms of domination and discrimination against one other (for which I have formerly attempted to coin a term encapsulating the history of democratic tradition: *equaliberty* [see "Rights"]). I would relate the idea of civility, in contrast, to the movement of identification and disidentification (or perhaps of distinction within even identification itself, without which there is no human solidarity), and consequently to the retreat from even the power of the collective (by which I do not mean individualism).

I hypothesize that, in addition to citizenship, there must be a proper moment of civility in politics in order to introduce the demand for anti-violence, or resistance to violence, particularly resistance to that reactive violence that produces violence and allows it to become generalized.

The "negative" universality of the community of citizens—not so much in its *extensive*, territorial, and consequently national dimension as in its *intensive*, egalitarian, and democratic dimension—is the result of the institution of public order in always only provisional conditions and within very narrow social limits. Negative universality acquires a historical dynamic as the subjective process that Claude Lefort calls "democratic invention," Jacques Rancière terms the demand of the "part without part," and what I myself have described as the emancipatory insurrection that simultaneously makes permanent and masks its constitution. But this insurrection, in its turn, has meaning only in relation to a law or communal order that it recognizes in a critical manner. How do we thus assimilate two subjective movements, at once very similar and yet never absolutely identical, that are both required by the circumstances in which we are confronted by an extreme violence? One of these leads us to demand justice, even reparations for the wrongs inflicted by domination and exploitation, and rights (specifically, equal rights) in the form of a constituent insurrection that founds community in a universal form. The other makes possible a distancing from the interests and fundamental images of a community; it is a movement whose specific universality is not of a communal and intensive type but is rather extensive and diasporic (a term that both takes up and extends the meaning of Foucault's heterotopia) ("Different"). Therein lies the enigma, or practical aporia of politics. But this aporia is also the opening that, in separating out the forms of terror or cruelty, can reconstitute or reinvent itself as politics in an aleatory fashion within each actually existing moment. Such an opening requires politics and at the same time gives it its chance.

This paradoxical combination, pragmatic or performative to the extent that it aims for a process of the self-transformation of politics and political subjectivity, is visible in Arendt's reflections on the problem of the politics of human rights. Arendt's fundamental assertion, and what one could call her political "theorem," performs a critical transformation of the emancipatory idea and demand contained in the proposition of equaliberty inseparable from the politics of human rights.[21] For Arendt, the crisis of the nation-state and the massive phenomena of denationalization—along with its accompanying deportations of populations—for which she forged

the expression "stateless" revealed that it is not human rights in the moral and philosophical (cosmopolitical) sense of the term that constitutes the basis and guarantee of the rights of the citizen and the state of right/law, but the inverse: where the institutionally defined rights of the citizen are abolished (and for those who are politically dispossessed), fundamental "human rights" no longer exist at all. The right to have rights that conditions all others is rooted neither in nature nor in revelation, nor is it reducible to or better understood as a positive, constituted modality of the exercise of power (which is to say also that it cannot be purely allocated by a sovereign, if he is the representative of the people). Rather, it constitutes itself at the juncture of individual resistance and the collective affirmation of a "public" dimension of human existence, that is, at the point of the birth of the institution. The universal declarations of rights that make liberty and equality into rigorously inseparable and reciprocal demands, without compromising the "lexicographical order" that tends to impose upon them despotic or oligarchical powers, effectively proclaim (through the mode of an injunction and a task, but also as the primary performative modality of its existence) *the reality of the "political form"* (which cannot exist outside of the element of language)—the community of citizens as the only form of the effective realization of "the human." The meaning of Arendt's republicanism, which is often said to have been inspired by ancient models and thus haunted by a nostalgia for the polis, for the small community of equals who are also similar (*homoi*), appears rather in the way that it poses a problem in terms of actuality and universality (the actuality of the universal in the epoch of globalization): the problem of the modalities of the institution of the right to right, that is, the problem of citizenship in a world in which political community no longer has a natural or traditional basis but can arise only from a decision or a practice. Thus, it seems to me, we must recognize that the rights of the citizen do not refer to a humanity or a preliminary human nature, but form a constitutive couple with the civility that is the other side of community—not so much the negative side in contrast to the positive, as its critical or even self-critical side.

We can reformulate this problem in a speculative manner: the only way of avoiding the democratic foundation of politics—what classical declarations called "natural" liberty and equality, with or without reference to a revelation—is to abolish the foundation itself and conceive politics (and the proposition of equaliberty) as an absolute fiction or an institution without foundation, necessarily and irremediably contingent. The only foundation is a negative foundation, a terror, a form of extreme violence,

or a combination of the forms of extreme violence that is terror itself. The possibility of avoiding the democratic foundation of power is therefore the exclusively practical, aleatory possibility of diverting terror, deferring it more or less completely and for a greater or lesser period of time. This would no doubt be a pessimistic proposition from the anthropological point of view, which, for that reason, we might still understand as Hobbesian, were it not true that the terror of which it speaks here has nothing to do with a prepolitical state of nature. That terror would be ultrapolitical, arising continuously from the way in which the political is continued by other means, or else takes its own means to the extreme. Consequently, such terror cannot be deferred by the institution of politics under the form of a juridical absolute, the sovereign *imperium* that pretends to "save" man from his nature. It is in this sense that I have attempted to conceive an institution of citizenship that would be continually measured in relation to civility, where the institution of civility would constitute the interior condition.[22]

It is impossible here not to mention, if only briefly, the tragic dimension of politics. Without a doubt, description of this dimension is not univocal even if, in our culture, it draws in part from similar sources: the Greek tradition, the work of Nietzsche. Such is the case of an author like Albert Camus, who extracted a tragic dimension from the morals of "engagement" and the religious or secular messianisms that allow our culture once again to represent a pole of reference.[23] In *The Rebel* (1951), Camus described revolution as the appropriation of revolt by the nihilism and delirium of destruction inspired by the illusion of the meaning of history. He defined political morality as the "idea of limits" and the "idea of meaning," which together give a sense of measure to the practice of conflict (the model of which was, in his eyes, Proudhon's revolutionary cynicism). Camus attempted to apply this philosophy to the war in Algeria, in particular by launching in 1956 (two years after the commencement of the war of liberation) an "appeal for a civil truce in Algeria," at the end of which the "two peoples" for whom Algeria had become the native land were to agree to limit the methods of their confrontation to forms recognized by the laws of war, thus separating fatality from tragedy (*Oeuvres* 383–92). From these impractical formulations (above all because they presuppose what must yet be established, the symmetrical position of the combatants in a colonial war), whatever their nobility and courage, it is necessary, I believe, to return to the earlier ideas of Max Weber in "Politics as a Vocation":

> *Whosoever contracts with violent means for whatever ends—and every politician does—is exposed to its specific consequences. This holds especially for the crusader, religious and revolutionary alike [. . .]. Whoever wants to engage in politics at all, and especially in politics as a vocation, has to realize these ethical paradoxes. He must know that he is responsible for what may become of himself under the impact of these paradoxes. I repeat, he lets himself in for the diabolic forces lurking in all violence [. . .]. Only he has the calling for politics who is sure that he shall not crumble when the world from his point of view is too stupid or too base for what he wants to offer. Only he who in the face of all this can say "In spite of all!" has the calling for politics. (124–25)*

But the question posed in politics today exceeds Weber's, which is still marked by the Machiavellian, Hegelian, and Nietzschian idea that great men make history. It would be, on the contrary, a question of knowing how the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility can themselves be democratically shared (*partagée*).

Personally, I would advance different hypotheses concerning this relation to tragedy. First, negatively, I would posit the idea that a politics of civility (which doubtless determines that tragedy cannot ever be completely oriented either to the epic or messianic mode) can no more identify itself with nonviolence than with the counterviolence that "prevents" violence or resists it. This also means that a politics of civility cannot coincide (in any case uniquely, or completely) with the imperative of peace. Further, it must give way not only to justice but also to the political confrontation (*agon*) or conflict without which it does not have the value of emancipation. A politics of civility simply cannot be achieved. For the essence of extreme violence lies not so much, perhaps, in destroying peace or in making it impossible, but in annihilating the conflict itself, imposing on it a disproportionality that deprives it of any history and any uncertainty. A relation of forces can develop to the point of a nonrelation of forces, of an excess that annihilates or annuls what Foucault called the *agon*, that is, the virtual reversal inscribed in the resistances to any form of domination and the "heterotopia" of the free spaces regulated by every social or territorial normality and that is proper to the possible evolution of any conflict in which fundamental social forces, and in consequence antagonistic principles of social organization, are invested.

For many years (and maybe even for many centuries, because the debate is in a certain way coextensive with the very idea of modernity), the discussion has addressed the "end of tragedy" by asking whether it must be considered irreversible and how it can be interpreted from the point of view of the relationship between aesthetic and political categories. Perhaps in effect it is no longer possible to write tragedies (which, without doubt, also implies that one could no longer write comedies). It must be possible to renew a writing of the tragic in the form of journalism or political discourse on the condition that one keeps in mind the fact that the tragic subjects of today (who I will not call heroes, even if their heroism is not in doubt) are those militants of the impossible who, in Palestine for example, come from two sides of a wall under construction. In doing so, they are attempting to make their bodies and their speech into obstacles to the irreversible separation of communities, while not forgetting which side is power and which is weakness.

The tragedy of politics is the element—to which Weber referred—of the excess of power that it contains. It is also the risk of perversion of the resistance, revolt, and revolution that oppression or terror inspires, which transforms resistance, revolt, and revolution into destructive or self-destructive counterviolence. One thinks of Kantian "demon-people" for whom the author of *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* said that a republican constitution must also be able to function, and who he identified perhaps with revolutionaries, that is, with the very subject of freedom in history. The tragedy of politics can become a politics of tragedy on the basis of the "ethical" decision that the risk of the perversion of the revolt is not a sufficient reason not to revolt. This would be, perhaps, the application "from below" (*par en bas)* of the Weberian formula, found in the final pages of "Politics as a Vocation," which poses the realization of the "impossible" in the diabolical element of power as the proper task of politics. To which I would be tempted to add that what is most diabolical in power is its powerlessness, or the illusion of omnipotence that is inherent to it. But is this not exactly what Weber means?

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**Notes**

1   See my "Violence et politique" and *Extreme Violence and the Problem of Civility.*

2   The expression "phenomenology of violence" is employed as such by Achille Mbembe in *On the Postcolony* (ch. 5), from which I borrow numerous elements cited below. Mbembe refers above all to the Hegelian understanding of the idea of phenomenology, which confronts consciousness at its own limits and from it extracts its own historicity. Of course, it can be equally understood, in the mode suggested by Husserl, either as the existential analysis of being-in-the-world, as is the case in Heidegger and to a certain extent the later example of Arendt, or as the deployment of the *plane of immanence* of events that demonstrate the potentialities of life, as is the case in Deleuze, drawing from certain leanings of Bergson and Sartre. The phenomenological approach, according to one or the other of these models, is not necessarily exclusive of a project of explanation, even causal, but serves to differentiate such a project and suspend any reductionist postulates. Compare, in a register apparently less phenomenological and more anthropological, Omar Carlier's analysis of the reproduction of the extreme violence of colonization to the decolonization of Algeria.

3   Enough importance is not given, in this respect, to the analysis by which, in the chapter on the totalitarianism of power that precedes the conclusion of her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt demonstrates for the first time that the Nazi genocide (and particularly the destruction of the European Jew in extermination camps) presupposed the realization of three successive conditions that made all the difference between a persecution and an extermination: the annihilation of the juridical statute, the destruction of moral personality, and the suppression of the individuality of existence (447–59).

4   See in particular Foucault's *Abnormal* and *"Society Must Be Defended."*

5   See Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am.*

6   See "Totalitarianism in Power," ch. 12.

7   Further discussion would consider the reconstitution of slavery by totalitarian regimes, which cannot altogether account for the relentlessness of the Nazis in privileging the carrying out of the "final solution" to the detriment of the larger war effort.

8   See also Spivak; and Wachtel.

9   See Deleuze, as well as my "Spinoza, the Anti-Orwell" in *Masses, Classes, Ideas.*

10   This argument revisits the problem posed throughout the letters of the grand witnesses of the universe of the concentration camp, who identify the limit-point of humanity's destruction and the individual's reduction to the status of a "thing" with the moment of the collapse of the capacity for communication and distribution (but to demonstrate also that this point is almost indefinitely remote, in such a way that the experience of the "living dead" is an experience of the human's capacity for resistance). Robert Antelme:

*We weren't yet used to death—not, at least, to the death found here; whereas his particular language, his dreads—and also his calm—were saturated with it.* We *still believed that some recourse was possible; that one*

*didn't just die, "like that"; that, when it did finally come to a question of dying, rights could be made to prevail; above all, that one couldn't watch a friend die without "doing something." (16)*

*The column keeps on. My legs keep going, one after the other. I don't know what they are still able to do, these legs. I don't as yet feel collapse coming from there. If they do fail, perhaps I can hang on a guy's arm; but if I don't recover strength he won't be able to keep me going for long. "I can't go on anymore," I'll say to him. He'll force me, will himself make a terrific effort for me, he'll do whatever you can for somebody who can't remain in charge of himself. "I can't go on anymore," I'll repeat, twice, three times. I'll have a different face, the face you get when you don't want to anymore. He won't be able to do any more for me, and I'll fall. (214)*

*A father called an old fool in front of his son. A hungry old man who'd steal in front of his son, so the son could eat. Father and son covered with lice, the two of them no longer looking their true age, coming to look alike. Both hungry together, offering their bread to each other, with loving eyes. And both of them here on the floor of the box-car. Were both of them to die, who could bear it [sic] but the weight of their deaths? [. . .] The SS believe that in the portion of mankind that they have chosen love must rot, because it cannot be anything but an aping of the love between real men, because it cannot really exist. But the extraordinary stupidity of this myth is obvious here, on the floor of this railroad car. For us, the old Spaniard may have become transparent; but not for the boy. [. . .] For the son, the father's language and transparency remain as immeasurably profound as*

*they were when the father was still fully sovereign. (262–63)*

Varlam Shalamov:

*Seryozha Klivansky died. He and I had been freshmen together at the university, and we met twenty years later in a cell for transit prisoners in Butyr Prison [. . .]. He loved poetry and recited verse by heart while in prison. He stopped doing that in camp. He would have shared his last morsel, or rather, he was still at that stage [. . .]. That is, he never reached the point where no one had a last morsel and no one shared anything with anyone. (303–4)*

*We suddenly felt that the bread ration did not sustain us, that an insatiable desire to eat was wearing us down [. . .]. It was impossible to buy anything, impossible to ask a comrade for the smallest crust of bread [. . .]. All of a sudden no one shared anything with anyone any longer, each of us nibbling on the sly, hastily, in the shadows, rummaging perpetually through our pockets in search of breadcrumbs. Hunting crumbs became the automatic occupation of any camp inmate when he had a free moment. But free moments became more and more scarce.* (Translated from the French by S. Bundy; see Chalamov 89)

11   As Badiou writes:

*Human rights are rights to non-Evil: rights not to be offended or mistreated with respect to one's life (the horrors of murder and execution), one's body (the horrors of torture, cruelty, and famine), or one's cultural identity (the horrors of the humiliation of women, of minorities, etc.). The power of this doctrine rests, at first glance, in its self-evidence. Indeed, we know from experience that suffering is highly visible. The eighteenth-century theoreticians had already*

*made pity—identification with the suffering of a living being—the mainspring of the relation with the other. That political leaders are discredited chiefly by their corruption, indifference, or cruelty was a fact already noted by the Greek theorists of tyranny. That it is easier to establish consensus regarding what is evil rather than regarding what is good is a fact already established by the experience of the Church: it was always easier for church leaders to indicate what was forbidden—indeed to content themselves with such abstinences—than to try to figure out what should be done. It is certainly true, moreover, that every politics worthy of the name finds its point of departure in the way people represent their lives and rights. It might seem, then, that we have here a body of self-evident principles capable of cementing a global consensus, and of imposing themselves strongly. Yet we must insist that it is not so; that this "ethics" is inconsistent, and that the—perfectly obvious— reality of the situation is characterized in fact by the unrestrained pursuit of self-interest, the disappearance or extreme fragility of emancipatory politics, the multiplication of "ethnic" conflicts, and the universality of unbridled competition. (9–10)*

12    For Badiou, who speaks in relation to his own philosophy of a "Platonism of the multiple," the classic conversion of Truth and Good, as poorly stated by critical philosophies, then by the "philosophies of suspicion," and finally by the post-Heideggerian philosophies of deconstruction that would like to present themselves as nonphilosophies, must be rethought starting from the substitution of the idea of the *multiple* for that of the *one*. This conversion is therefore associated not with the idea of eternity or

of transcendence, but with those of the event (of which the fundamental characteristic is rarity) and immanence. But it remains associated with the critique of the "life-world" and with the belief (or faith, fidelity) in immortality that grants to faith or fidelity a "truth." This truth reveals the established knowledge and institution that it serves by its power of rupture or force (but on the condition of guarding against the "betrayals" that return truths to the service of order, and from the "simulacra" that create the non-event) from the universal, but on the basis of the particular: thus the national-socialist "revolution." Hence the militant character of ethical faith based upon the definition of Good as Truth.

13    See Badiou, ch. 3, "Ethics as a Figure of Nihilism." It is necessary to note that, in Badiou's perspective, the obsession with death is not fundamentally different from an obsession with life, as these are only two faces of the same representation that he calls "animality." Death as it is in question here is not therefore truly analyzed according to differential modalities (for which it would be necessary to establish a phenomenology), but is a synonym of "mortality" in general.

14    In the chapter of *Ethics* titled "The Problem of Evil," Badiou challenges at once the discourse of "the uniqueness of the Holocaust" and that of its indefinite repetition, two sides of the same negative opinion wherein the incompatibility is only too apparent:

       *In fact, this paradox is simply that of radical Evil itself (and, in truth, of every "mise en transcendence" of a reality or concept). The measure must itself be unmeasurable, yet it must constantly be measured.*

*The extermination is indeed both that which measures all the Evil our time is capable of, being itself beyond measure, and that to which we must compare everything (thus measuring it unceasingly) that we say is to be judged in terms of the manifest certainty of Evil. As the supreme negative example, this crime is inimitable, but every crime is an imitation of it. (61)*

The question of the use of prototypes, or better yet, of the *names* of absolute Evil (and even the name *Evil*) in the construction of the enemy figure around which rallies a community or a social order (which can be extremely violent and disorderly itself) is without any doubt a fundamentally anthropological question that can also be studied in a concrete and localized manner. See, for example, Caldeira on the criminalization and demonization of the poor in the Brazilian megalopolises (São Paulo), and the extreme violence of the public and private police in response to mass illegalities.

15    The term *unpolitical*, derived in part from the title of Thomas Mann's famous work *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, translated into English as *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, has been notably taken up in a series of works by Roberto Esposito, beginning with *Categorie dell'impolitico* and *Nove pensieri sulla politica*, in which an entire chapter is consecrated to the question of evil as a political category, starting with a definition of evil as the phenomenon of *the deletion of the enemy's trace* (see ch. 8).

16    See my "Violence, idéalité, et cruauté" as well as *Extreme Violence and the Problem of Civility*.

17    Carl von Clausewitz, as is well known, believed that in war the military objective (that of the "decisive battle") is the annihilation of the defensive capacity of the adversary or of his capacity for resistance, but he carefully distinguished this military objective from a political objective and consequently maintained a distinction between the destruction of the means and that of the very existence of men, their elimination or their transformation into "superfluous" objects.

18    On the complementarity and inconsistency of Arendt's two formulations, which have given place to various commentaries, see Ophir.

19    See Derrida, "Psychoanalysis." See also Benslama.

20    See, in particular, my "Three Concepts of Politics."

21    See Arendt, pt. 2, ch. 9, "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of Human Rights." Of the various commentaries written on this text, see in particular Caloz-Tschopp.

22    There is a reflection upon that which, despite their initial proximity (which is evident above all in the allegory of the "murder of the father" as a condition of the political reuniting of brothers, or "likenesses"), ultimately separates Freud from Hobbes and that unfolds from texts like Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* or *Civilization and Its Discontents*, where cruelty is situated on the side of the "civilizing" structure and the political institution, which implicitly call for a strategy of the self-limitation of sovereign authority.

23    The relation of Camus to the Greeks is mediated not only by Nietzsche but also by Simone Weil. See, for example, Weil's "Ne recommençons pas la guerre de Troie."

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