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The Moralization of Politics and the Denial of Constitutive Aggressiveness as a Mode of *Jouissance*

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Abstract. This paper examines the effects of the moralization of politics as a mode of *jouissance* in academic approaches to aggression and extreme violence, particularly in contemporary contexts such as the far-right, fascism, and totalitarianism. Drawing on the analysis of several key works, it argues that this moralization conceals a deeper and more insidious issue: the denial of constitutive aggression. Specifically, it highlights how this denial stems from an unwillingness to acknowledge that some individuals may genuinely desire destruction. As a result, this refusal undermines the development of effective public policies for managing political conflict, since such conflict is no longer understood as an inherent aspect of human subjectivity.

Keywords. *Jouissance*, constitutive aggression, moralization of politics, violence, far-right.

The current political atmosphere is one of unease and fear. The emergence of political movements and governments that identify with the far-right or openly fascist discourses across much of the world has set off alarm bells. At the same time, we are witnessing the normalization

of brutal genocide in Palestine¹, the rise of white supremacism, the persecution of LGBTQ+ communities, renewed conservative attacks on women's rights, and the growing influence of the so-called manosphere. These developments raise the question of what conditions have allowed political models, in which aggression and extreme violence prevail, to become so appealing and popular among millions of people worldwide. A clear example of such popularity is the re-election of Donald Trump as President of the United States in 2024, when he secured 49.8% of the popular vote (Federal Election Commission 2025), despite, or perhaps because of, his openly anti-immigrant, misogynistic, and far-right populist positions.

Nonetheless, Trump is not the only political figure who cast himself as an outsider challenging the dominant narrative that liberal-procedural democracy represents the best form of government. His populist, confrontational, and antagonistic style has been shared by figures such as Javier Milei in Argentina or Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, marked by open contempt towards women, migrants, the LGBTQ+ communities, people with disabilities, people of African descent and different ethnic groups. Similar positions can also be observed in far-right parties with a longer historical tradition, such as *Rassemblement National* (RN) in France. However, Trump's style is exceptional. His (brief) association with Elon Musk – who openly expressed sympathy for the German far-right party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) and was even seen in public performing a Nazi-style salute (Bennhold 2025) – together with the launch of an intense campaign of raids against immigrants and the establishment of detention centers (Singh, Craft, & Witherspoon 2025), shows that we are facing a dangerous scenario that evokes the darkest episodes of the twentieth century.

This situation is particularly concerning given the vast number of newspaper articles and opinions published daily that warn about the *return* of fascism (Reich 2025, Stewart 2025, Lempinen 2024). A similar pattern is evident in the academic world. The proliferation of articles and books on fascism and its relevance and applicability for the contemporary era (Delfino & Eissa 2023, Eley 2021, Adeney Thomas 2020, Mudde 2019), the emergence of new concepts such as post-fascism or neo-fascism (Traverso 2017, Tamás 2001), and ongoing debates about whether the far-right is different from or equivalent to fascism (Delfino & Eissa 2023, Eley 2021, Mudde 2019, Ryngren 2018, Davies & Lynch 2002), all indicate that this is an issue that demands urgent attention. The following questions arise: how do different parts of the political community see themselves represented by these discourses? What do they get

1 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/israel-has-committed-genocide-gaza-strip-un-commission-finds>

in return? Why do they vote in favor of parties that advocate/promote aggression and extreme violence towards some communities?

Because our times remain overshadowed by the historical experience of fascisms and totalitarianisms in the twentieth century, discussing these questions is particularly complicated. Nonetheless, fascism and totalitarianism² have been studied in depth, with sophisticated and detailed analyses that examine their immediate political, social, and economic causes (Traverso 2017; 2002; Paxton 2004; Davies & Lynch 2002; Payne 1995, 1980; Laclau 1977; Brunner, Conze, y Koselleck 1975; Crick 1973), as well as the conditions of possibility shaped by medium – and long-term historical processes (Forti 2001; Marcuse 1998; Bobbio, Matteuci, and Pasquino 1976; Arendt 1963, 1951; Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson & Nevitt Sanford 1950)³. However, beyond the terror evoked by the horrifying images of concentration camps, the central problem, as we will see later, is that these studies are often accompanied by explicit or implicit moral judgments. As a result, fascism and totalitarianism are often treated as exceptional or *abnormal* episodes in history (Delfino & Eissa 2023; Eley 2021; Traverso 2017; Marcuse 1998; Payne 1995, 1982, Crick 1973; Arendt 1963, 1951; Adorno et.al. 1950). This tendency sidelines the crucial question of the underlying psychic and social conditions that enable the deployment of such extreme levels of aggressiveness and violence, producing interpretations that oversimplify or omit the complex dynamics at play. Such omissions, in turn, affect how contemporary far-right phenomenon is framed, since the existing studies often serve as immediate references, setting the tone for present-day analysis.

This does not mean, however, that there are no studies examining the psychic and social conditions that give rise to extreme political scenarios. A notable contribution was made by the Frankfurt School. Drawing on psychoanalysis, Theodor Adorno et al. (1950) suggested that identification with authoritarianism stems from behaviors that cannot be explained rationally, but rather in relation to «personality deep-lying trends» (Adorno et al. [1950]: 1-13). Also inspired by psychoanalysis, Herbert Marcuse (1998) studied how drives were articulated through the relationship between gratification and punishment under Nazism. Although the studies inspired by psychoanalysis have opened up an entire field of research into the relationship between psyche and politics, some authors tend to underestimate the agency of subjects who participate in or identify with authoritarian projects, thereby generating a diminished subjective responsibility –

2 Although this concept appears less frequently in the contemporary public sphere, I include it because it is part of the semantic network that was articulated in the 20th century to identify regimes that deployed a systematic use of extreme violence.

3 This list of references is intended to be illustrative, not exhaustive. To review the enormous production around these phenomena is beyond the scope of this paper.

either by suggesting that the masses are *manipulated* by external interests alien to them, or that they have merely fallen prey to *deception*.

More recent studies (Kisić-Merino 2025; Hook 2017; Glynos & Stavrakakis 2008) that integrate the psychoanalytic concept of *jouissance* (Lacan 1999, 1992, 1966b) as a key tool for addressing the problem of far-right movements or other political phenomena, tend to emphasize the celebratory and articulatory aspect of *jouissance* – its relation to fantasy and the identification mechanisms – while neglecting its distinctly destructive character. The modalities of *jouissance* associated with destruction, and their role in the escalation of extreme violence have not been studied in depth. A notable exception is Slavoj Žižek (1994), who stresses the relationship between *jouissance* and the death drive, the superego, and constitutive aggressiveness in politics. Yet, even his analysis fails to refrain from moral qualifications, conceptualizing these dynamics in terms of *evil* (Žižek [1994]: 70-71).

My aim is neither to discuss each of these views in detail nor to dismiss them simply because they ignore the destructive character of *jouissance*. These studies have greatly enriched and broadened the horizon of analysis. Yet, only a few studies take aggressiveness into account, and when they do, they tend to moralize the role it plays in the configuration of scenarios of extreme violence. This suggests that we are confronted with a *concealment* operation. In this light, what kind of analysis can be carried out if constitutive aggressiveness is not treated as a central element of society? How can we conceive the structural conditions that precipitate political conflicts without addressing the experience of provoked pleasure or displeasure? What about the pleasure derived from the exercise of aggression or destruction? How to incorporate the concept of *jouissance* (enjoyment) into the analysis of aggression and extreme violence? In short, what is the relationship between libidinal economy and politics? How can public policies be devised if they operate under the assumption of human beings that exist only in theory?

In the following lines, I will address these questions through two main premises. First, this *concealment* operation responds to a long-term historical experience in which the interpretation of political conflict has been moralized, a process Reinhard Koselleck (1959) called the *moralization of politics*. Second, the moralization of politics rests on a more insidious operation: the denial of constitutive human aggressiveness. Beyond the fact that this articulation shapes how the enemy is identified and how scenarios of aggression and extreme violence emerge (Álvarez Garro 2018), my concern is here to show how it operates insidiously within academic-scientific research, ultimately obstructing a realistic understanding of these phenomena and, consequently, significantly limiting our possibilities of envisaging realistic alternatives for the containment of political conflict.

The problem of aggressiveness

In his book *Critique and Crisis* (1959), Koselleck examines conditions that led to the development of weapons of mass extermination – the atomic bombs – and their relationship to philosophies of history. For this purpose, he suggests a *longue durée* perspective that situates the emergence of these conditions of possibility in the prelude to the Enlightenment, specifically in the eighteenth-century France and Germany (Koselleck [1959]: 5). Unlike Absolutism, which separated morality from politics, for Koselleck the Enlightenment was marked by a *moralization of politics* (Koselleck [1959]: 138-157). This *moralization*, as an heir to the Christian soteriological tradition, permeated critical exercise and opened the door to the moral judgment of politics (Koselleck [1959]: 130-131), a practice that persists to this day. In this way, Koselleck illuminates a crucial but often obscured aspect of political experience since the eighteenth century: the reduction of political conflict to a moral distinction that divides the world into *good* and *evil*. This reduction implies that when the enemy is deemed evil, the immediate consequence is the legitimization of prosecution and destruction, as the enemy becomes cast as the representative of earthly *evil*.

Framing political conflict as part of moral struggle not only guarantees impunity for actions carried out in the name of *the good* but also opens the space for a libidinal gain: the pleasure of assuming moral *superiority*. This affective dimension, not explicitly addressed by Koselleck, is central to my argument. I contend that the moralization of politics not only secures the illusion of certainty, the conviction of *possessing moral truth* by which others are judged, but also generates a space of *jouissance*, the enjoyment derived from imposing one's moral perspective on others. In this sense, the moralization of politics does not neutralize conflict but redirects constitutive aggressiveness into moralized forms of hostility, thereby legitimizing violence while concealing the psychic and social dynamics that sustain it.

It is striking how this moralization continues to act insidiously in the interpretation of political conflict to the present day. In many ways, we are still grappling with the consequences of the Enlightenment. Beyond its role in shaping how enemies are identified, whether from the left or the right, and in legitimizing persecution and annihilation of the enemy through strategies of dehumanization (Álvarez Garro 2018), I am particularly interested in how moralization works in the analysis and study of political conflicts. What stands out is the remarkable inability of most theorists and scholars, whether from the left or the right, progressive or conservative, to discuss or debate political antagonisms without resorting to moral judgments or relying on residues of the philosophies of history to ground their argument. I intend to show how this hidden moralization not only

obscures alternative mechanisms for understanding the roots of political conflict and borderline scenarios, but also radically undermines the possibility of generating innovative proposals for addressing them.

Arendt's view of aggressiveness

It is well known that one of the most influential authors in the study of political conflicts where aggressiveness and extreme violence are present has been Hanna Arendt. Her books *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) and *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963) are considered classics on the subject and must read for anyone who delves into the study of these phenomena. However, Arendt's exhaustive analysis of the political, social, and economic causes of totalitarianism is overshadowed by the presence of moral judgments that reveal the author's subjective position when confronted with it, and her difficulties in apprehending and accepting it as *possible*. The first thing that catches the eye in Arendt's work is the theoretical decision to approach the problem of aggression and extreme violence by examining the concept of evil. In this sense, stating that totalitarianism is gestated through the appearance of a *radical evil*, in a world without political, historical, or moral norms, or where common sense fails (Arendt [1951]: 443), sets an immediate distance with respect to the *possible*, as if with this qualification one managed to conjure at once the immanent character of aggressiveness and send it to a transcendentality:

wherever these systems became truly totalitarian, they started to operate according to a system of values so radically different from all others, that none of our traditional legal, moral, or common sense utilitarian categories could any longer help us to understand, or judge, or predict their course of action. (Arendt [1951]: 460)

This detachment is accompanied by an interpretation that confuses the conventional character of the law with a moral fact. Arendt assumes that the moral principles from the Enlightenment have become immovable ground, elevating Human Rights (HR) to the status of facticities. This is evident through the insistent denunciation that totalitarianism is a criminal State for denying human rights and for dismantling the relationship between law, utility, and justice; or by making injustice legal (Arendt [1963]: 290-291; [1951]: 269, 447). It is even more perplexing that Arendt ([1951]: 420) recognizes that human rights respond to the solution of a historical problem but does not recognize as politically valid that someone, under another historical context, may challenge this solution. It is established as a point of no return. In that sense, Arendt places the doctrine of human rights as an unquestionable and immovable foundation of politics, a convention that is elevated to the status of a *moral law*. She omits the *polemi-*

cal character of the law, the ever-present possibility of justifying the destruction of the enemy on the grounds that the enemy is not human and therefore is not *entitled to human rights*. Despite the exhaustiveness with which Arendt treats the subject, she sends totalitarianism to the realm of the incredible and the extraordinary. Although in other parts of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* she recognizes that extreme violence is possible in the practical world, it is not an object of analysis, generating an irresolvable tension in her argumentation. This is evidenced when Arendt states that:

it is quite conceivable, and even within the realm of practical political possibilities, that one fine day a highly organized and mechanized humanity will conclude quite democratically – namely by majority decision – that for humanity as a whole it would be better to *liquidate certain parts* thereof. (Arendt [1951]: 299, author's emphasis)

That is, Arendt recognizes that a desire to liquidate a part of humanity is potentially possible, but she does not pursue this analysis to its full extent. If Arendt were to recognize that there can be a desire for destruction as part of a wide range of reasons that can lead human beings to support such political proposals, she would not only have to acknowledge the pleasure and *jouissance* that comes from the destruction of the other, but she would have to recognize that this is an ever-present possibility.

This hesitation in addressing the desire for destruction and the pleasure associated with it can also be observed in the way Arendt describes the masses. She tends to think of the group of human beings that compose masses as homogeneous⁴, as if they were a uniform group without significant internal divergences in terms of motivations or interests, passions, or affections, and at times she also portrays it as devoid of subjective responsibility for the destruction it supports. The mass appears *prey* to its circumstances and for this reason can be attracted by *evil*.

For Arendt the masses are fickle, innocent, naive, unreliable, and forgetful, thus prone to be *fascinated* by a leader (Arendt [1951]: 305-306). Accordingly, they may be drawn to *evil* and *crime*. All this is possible because in the context of totalitarianism the ability to think and discern has been annulled, introducing a total conformism (Arendt [1951]: 306-308). In this view, the masses are deprived of subjective responsibility and characterized as «apathetic and stupid», losing interest in their own welfare (Arendt [1951]: 311-317). In short, Arendt seems to construct an approach in which the masses are stripped of their responsibility and reason, as if they *could not* be called to account: «The chief characteristic

4 A tendency shared by many scholars who use the concept of the masses (Traverso 2017, Forti 2001, Paxton 2004; Payne 1995, 1980, Laclau 1977, Bobbio, Matteuci, y Pasquino 1976, Crick 1973).

of the mass-man is not brutality and backwardness, but his isolation and lack of normal social relationships» (Arendt [1951]: 317). They are puppets: «Total power can be achieved and safeguarded only in a world of conditioned reflexes, of marionettes without the slightest trace of spontaneity» (Arendt [1951]: 457).

Additionally, Arendt's use of the opposition normality-abnormality to characterize totalitarianism excludes it from the regular or common possibilities of existence, sending this phenomenon to a *beyond* that makes it difficult to approach. In that sense, it is as if she did not know what to do with the destructive potentialities of the human being: «For a considerable length of time the *normality* of the *normal* world is the most efficient protection against disclosure of totalitarian mass crimes» (Arendt [1951]: 436, emphasis given by the author). Meanwhile, the opposition normality – perversion or sadism (Arendt [1963]: 276) is another strong proof of the inadmissibility of the constitutive aggression in Arendt. By considering them opposites, she elevates sadism to a pathological category, since a *normal* human being could only commit these destructive acts unaware of the nature of his actions, and thus cannot be imputed or held accountable:

The worst in the Eichmann case was precisely that so many others were like him, and that those others were neither perverts nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal. From the viewpoint of our legal institutions and moral standards of judgment, this normality was much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together, for it implied, as had been said at Nuremberg over and over again by the defendants and their counsels, that this new type of criminal, who is in actual fact *hostis generis humani*, commits his crimes *under circumstances that make it nearly impossible for him to know or to feel that he is doing wrong*. (Arendt [1963]: 276, author's emphasis)

Yet, there are passages that indicate that Arendt clearly conceived that destruction can provoke pleasurable effects, but it is notable that she did not know how to analyze it. For example, when she makes the distinction between *us* and *them* (referring to those who support totalitarian movements): «To them, violence, power, cruelty, were the supreme capacities of men who had definitely lost their place in the universe» (Arendt [1951]: 330); or when she stresses the pleasure that could be generated through destruction: «The members of the elite did not object at all to paying a price – the destruction of civilization – for the *fun* of seeing how those who had been excluded unjustly in the past forced their way out» (Arendt [1951]: 332, emphasis given by the author); «The temporary alliance between the elite and the mob rested largely on this genuine *delight* with which the former watched the latter destroy respectability» (Arendt [1951]: 333, emphasis given by the author).

One might think that for Arendt it was out of common sense that some people possess a desire for destruction. This disbelief leads her to understand totalitarianism as a phenomenon that materializes what she considers *perverse and evil fantasies*. Her reluctance to accept that such an extreme level of aggression could

exist is remarkable, despite the fact that such levels of torture and murder have been witnessed throughout history. The experience of the colonies and plantations since the seventeenth century serves as the pertinent example (Mbembe 2016). The difference, of course, lies in the massive nature of aggression and extreme violence in the 20th century, but that is a technical issue, not whether it is possible or not.

In that line, although it can be argued that, at the time of Arendt's writing, this phenomenon was novel for the European world, it is striking that there are numerous events of extreme violence in European history, such as the wars of religion or the Inquisition (Álvarez Garro [2018]: 33). These events vanish into obscurity when Arendt states that it is the first time that such a level of cruelty and terror is observed: «we emphasized repeatedly that the means of total domination are not only more drastic but that totalitarianism differs essentially from other forms of political oppression known to us such as despotism, tyranny and dictatorship» (Arendt [1951]: 460). For Arendt, totalitarianism meant a different form of government that in an *unparalleled* way broke the relationship between legality and legitimacy (Arendt [1951]: 461), installing total terror as its «essence» (Arendt [1951]: 466) through an entirely new and *unprecedented* conception of power (Arendt [1951]: 417). In this sense, we should ask ourselves if the insistent qualification of totalitarianism as an unprecedented and novel phenomenon, accompanied by a convenient oblivion of the events of extreme violence within the European territory that resulted in the persecution of women and minorities in the name of religion, is the effect of the same excuse with which Arendt dilutes the subjective responsibility of Eichmann, when she stated that «*He simply never realized what he was doing*» (Arendt [1963]: 287, italics in the original).

Arendt's difficulty in accepting the possibility of a desire for and pleasure in destruction in human beings generates serious connotative effects in her theory. She creates a *tragic* historical narrative in which millions of people are *led* or *led unknowingly* to collaborate in the destruction, unaware of their *part* in the matter, so that they could not be called to account. In this line, totalitarianism appears as an aberration or an anomaly, rather than an ever-present possibility within any political community.

Moralization and the Far-right

It is clear that Arendt is not the only author who has engaged with the problem of extreme aggression, nor is she the only one who struggled to assimilate its presence. The echo of her interpretations of totalitarianism can be traced in contemporary authors. For example, Enzo Traverso ([2002]: 2)

refers to the period opened by the First World War as the «beginning of a barbarization of politics», as if war and the annihilation of entire populations had not been present before. Similarly, Simona Forti ([2001]: 139) reiterates the gesture of locating totalitarianism as an *aberrant* and *exceptional regime* with the ability to destroy *reality*. These examples illustrate a broader tendency to emphasize the exceptional and abnormal character of totalitarianisms. Beyond the conceptual debates about totalitarianism and its relations to fascism and the far-right, I am interested in obvious difficulty of acknowledging, even as a mere possibility, that some individuals actively identify with political projects that sustain aggression or violence against others, not merely as a result of deception, manipulation, or harm. Why is it so hard to accept that for some people constitutive aggressiveness and the desire for destruction might prevail? Why not consider the implications of such identification for narcissistic satisfaction and for regulating the pleasure-displeasure dichotomy? Neglecting these questions has consequences for theorizing totalitarianisms, fascisms, and contemporary forms of far-right. Although it is not possible to examine each interpretation in detail here, it can be argued that the disregard of the possibility of constitutive aggressiveness seems to form a common basis across them all.

The same difficulty is also evident in discussions about the far-right, beyond the debate the term itself may generate⁵. For example, when Delfino & Eissa ([2023]: 186) analyze the emergence of the far-right in the 21st century, they reproduce the commonplace that we are facing the possible loss of a civilizing milestone. Although they do not explicitly frame this as a departure from Enlightenment principles, they argue that the problem lies in the abandonment of the foundations that give rise to the modern social contract. In doing so, however, they overlook two key facts. First, that the idea of the social contract in Europe emerged partly as a response to the critique voiced by millenarian populations of the Americas against monarchical rule; and second, that theories of the social contract were used to justify philosophies of history dividing the world between civilized and primitive, thereby legitimizing colonial invasion (Graeber and Wengrow [2021]: 27-77). From this perspective, the social contract was far from being «the touchstone for making possible an order that would endow the fiction of the common good with vitality»⁶ (Delfino and Eissa [2023]: 188).

Although Delfino and Eissa try to dissociate themselves from naive explanations why people support far-right positions, they nevertheless reproduce an image of the *electorate* – no longer a mass but a public – that responds pri-

5 Is all Far-right Fascism? If so, why use the concept of Far-right? If not, how to distinguish them?

6 Each quote from Delfino & Eissa (2023) is a translation by the author.

marily to the damage inflicted by current political and economic conditions. What is never considered is the possibility that some in that electorate may derive enjoyment from exercising aggression or excessive violence against others.

It is tempting to think that leaders such as Trump emerged simply as a result of the votes of an ignorant population or of citizens deceived by fake news [...] However, people seem to opt for discourses that engage them, that speak to them, discourses that contain their sorrows and propose diagnoses and actions that offer a horizon of resolutions and paths [...] In this way, the discourse channels their discomfort with unfulfilled promises of the contract of Modernity, which once dreamed of a world of equals, of free people, of friends, and woke up to a world of the poor, the excluded, and wars (Delfino & Eissa [2023]: 187-188).

The reasons they outlined are certainly valid for understanding popular support for such leaders. But by omitting aggressiveness as a feature that is constitutive to humans, they leave aside a key element of analysis.

Likewise, Geoff Eley ([2021]: 10) interprets the emergence of fascism⁷ as a rupture with previous modes of managing political opposition, highlighting its brutal character. Yet, this again raises the question of historical background: not only does it repeat the tendency to overlook European history, but also to ignore all the postcolonial critiques identifying how such policies of death had already been applied in Africa, Asia, and Americas (Mbembe 2016). Hence, although Eley seeks to establish a formal concept of fascism that allows the analysis of far-right movements, he does not acknowledge the desire for destruction or something similar to the pleasure derived from violence as a defining feature of these scenarios.

In sum, the literature reviewed reveals a persistent difficulty in incorporating constitutive aggressiveness and its effects into analyses of political conflicts marked by extreme violence. This striking omission demonstrates the underlying moral position of many authors, which denies the possibility that aggression can produce pleasure and that excess is a fundamental tendency of human beings. In contrast, I will try to show how ignoring this possibility amounts to a collective denial, an unwillingness to confront or assume the presence of constitutive aggressiveness in human beings, and the fact that some people desire destruction. This denial creates enormous difficulties for generating realistic approaches to political conflict: by ignoring this property of human experience, we not only fail to analyze the conditions that fuel constitutive aggressiveness and transform it into hatred and vengeance but

7 For Eley fascism is Far-right, he does not distinguish it as two distinct concepts.

also makes impossible the development of viable proposals for containing such conflicts.

Violent delights have violent ends

The keystone of my proposal is the Lacanian concept of *jouissance* (Kisić-Merino 2025; Hook 2017; Glynos y Stravakakis 2008; Lacan 1999, 1992, 1966b). In Jacques Lacan the French term *jouissance* has a sexual connotation absent from its English translation ‘enjoyment’ (Lacan 1999, 1992, 1966b). He associates it with the orgasmic discharge, while also insisting on the distinction between pleasure and enjoyment. However, to deepen this analysis, we must first revisit the Freud’s concept of the *death drive* (Freud [1920]).

In broad terms, Freud introduced the death drive to explain a series of clinical phenomena, such as the repetition compulsion, or the negative therapeutic reaction. The drive has the status of a theoretical assumption which, like the concept of the unconscious, proves its heuristic value insofar as it provides an explanatory mechanism for phenomena that seem to go *beyond the pleasure principle*⁸. The fact that some patients seemed unable to escape the repetition of destructive scenarios or symptoms, or more troubling, showed a negative therapeutic reaction, led Freud (1920) to posit the existence of destructive forces within each organism: a tendency to return to the inorganic or earlier stages of organization. This implies a constitutive aggressiveness which is expressed differently depending on whether it is directed inward or outward.

Freud’s theory of death drive has two important consequences that I want to emphasize. First, in every human being there exists a tendency not only to regress to a previous stage of organization but also toward destruction. This has profound political implications, as it requires us to consider how this constitutive condition affects and shapes identification with conservative positions and becomes articulated through political discourses that redirect the drive for destruction outwards, against all that is located outside the community or culture, whether migrants, non-normative sexualities, and women, among others. Second, Freud’s account illuminates the relationship between the death drive, satisfaction, and pleasure. He never hesitated to expose the fine line between pleasure and pain, as evident in sadomasochistic scenarios (Freud [1924]). Nor did he dismiss the pleasure generated through the exercise of power, as suggested by his occasional use of the notion of the *drive*

8 The pleasure principle indicates that all psychic activity is directed at avoiding unpleasure and at obtaining pleasure. Unpleasure is understood as the increase in the amounts of psychic agitation, while pleasure is associated with its decrease (Freud [1920]).

for mastery [*Bemächtigungstrieb*] (Freud [1905]), later subsumed under the broader concept of the death drive (Freud [1920]). However, it is Lacan who explores these phenomena in greater depth, through his re-reading of the death drive in relation to *jouissance*.

For Lacan, every drive contains within itself the possibility of *jouissance*, since each can exceed the pleasure principle, which is the constitutive limit that prevents drives from tipping into excess. *Jouissance*, therefore, is excessive, traumatic, and anchored in the body (Hook [2017]: 612). In this sense, the pleasure principle sets a boundary to *jouissance*; it is a law commanding the subject to «enjoy as little as possible» (Hook [2017]: 609; Evans [2007]: 93-94). It is precisely this constraint to *jouissance* that makes human community possible, insofar as it imposes barriers that hinder and redirect drives that, if left on their own will, would only lead to destruction.

Yet, despite its destructive character, the libidinal satisfaction caused by the transgression of the pleasure principle seduces and constantly pushes the subject to breach its limit, at which point he/she only finds pain. Because the subject can tolerate only a certain amount of pleasure, its excess leads to painful pleasure, or *jouissance* (Hook [2017]: 612). At this point, the relationship between *jouissance* and the death drive appears, insofar as this compulsion for excess marks the path toward death.

If the pleasure principle may be considered as a life drive, it is because it sets limits on the destructive capacities inherent to human beings. This implies that it is through the renunciation of the absolute satisfaction of our desires, including the desire to destroy others or oneself, that culture can survive and keep at bay the tendencies toward its dissolution, as Freud (1930) rightly pointed out in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. For Lacan, this operation imposes the need to seek satisfaction *elsewhere*, which allows desire to emerge and metonymic drive pathways to develop, providing alternatives for the pursuit of pleasure (Lacan 1966c). However, when this possibility is blocked, whether by political, social, economic, or subjective limitations, the subject may come to desire the destruction of the community, finding no benefit in limiting his/her *jouissance*. Without limits, the subject jumps into the void of *jouissance*, where satisfaction collapses into a spiral of destruction of self and others.

I am interested in exploring the intimate relationship between *jouissance* and the death drive and how it operates in the moralization of politics, to expand Koselleck's interpretation of the legitimization of extreme violence (Koselleck [1959]) and to link this phenomenon to a psychic economy that makes it possible.

Koselleck stresses that one of the consequences of the moralization of politics was the development of a hypercriticism that permeated all areas of social life based on moral superiority. Those who were judged and condemned as immoral deserved their persecution and annihilation. From a psychoanalytic

point of view, this implied lifting drive barriers to justify the destruction of the other. The obstacles containing these powerful drives were removed under the pretext of moral rightness, supported by philosophies of history or any other moral justification.

Alongside Freud and Lacan, Koselleck's interpretation allows us to understand the emergence of extreme violence as a political phenomenon that is grounded in this human predisposition. Yet, while Koselleck associated the emergence of totalitarianism or fascism with this long-lasting structure, he did not explain why moralization functions so effectively in creating destructive scenarios. Beyond its theological substratum hidden behind moralization, we should look at the pleasurable and joyful character of destruction. I would like to emphasize that the moralization of politics provokes powerful identificatory effects, associated with the sadistic pleasure, stemming from a tendency to impose oneself on others and to demonstrate superiority and hierarchy. Let's not forget that Freud associated the drive for mastery with humiliation, control, and domination through violence. This desire to control others provokes an intense pleasure that can easily tip into *jouissance*. The crucial question is, then, which political scenarios enable or prevent the display of humanity's most destructive desires.

The greatest difficulty, however, lies in the invisibility of this whole operation. As Koselleck ([1959]: 98-123) points out, the moralization of politics is hypocritical and ignores its very political and violent exercise. From a psychoanalytic perspective, it constitutes a collective denial of constitutive aggressiveness that produces *jouissance*. This collective denial is not only confined to people who are part of a political conflict but, as I showed above, is also present in most of the political and social analyses. Since many scholars, from classical to contemporary, explain fascism, totalitarianism, or far-right movements through the lens of *evil*, it is worth asking whether such analyses rest on fantasy of ignorance. It is significant that this generates its own mode of *jouissance*. First, it guarantees a moral position in which *jouissance* as a possibility appears veiled and hidden. Thus, it allows for the reinforcement of moral superiority: it is a problem of *others* considered *evil*, not *our* problem. Here, moral indignation is a way of positioning oneself as *good* and therefore *incapable* of committing violent acts. Second, this moral framing of political conflict, even in academic context, rests on the fantasy of escaping aggression as a constitutive condition. This too enables *jouissance*: the enjoyment of denouncing others who are fascinated or driven by evil forces to act badly. In both cases, moralization enables an insidious position of power that enjoys the pretense of escaping from its inherent aggressiveness.

This leads me to the concluding point. If we accept Koselleck's premise that the moralization of politics has served as the socio-symbolic framework under which the possibility of annihilation and destruction has been justified, then this moralization must be seen as a part of the long-lasting symbolic structure shaping our

interpretation of political conflict. Once we also recognize that the collective denial of constitutive aggression itself enables a mode of *jouissance*, what emerges is a psychic-political framework that has long operated as the backdrop to our historical experience and has prevented a realistic approach to political conflict.

Hence, the moralization of politics remains an effective strategy. It is effective insofar as it is bound up with *jouissance*. On the one hand, it allows aggression to be unleashed under the guise of moral law, in which the other becomes a subject to be corrected through a sadistic authoritarian exercise in which I impose my moral vision of the world. This allows the release of inner aggressive impulses, exacerbated by current conditions of inequality and oppression. On the other hand, moralization operates insidiously within scholarly approaches to aggression and extreme violence. By dismissing inherent aggression in their analyses, scholars reinforce a boundary between those deemed *bad* or prone to *fascination* with violent proposals, and those deemed *good*, whose morally outrage sets them apart. This division perpetuates an endless spiral of violence.

As long as the concrete and real possibility of violence is not acknowledged, little can be done to contain it. Unless we explicitly accept the existential fact of our own aggressiveness and assume its consequences, we will remain unable to develop realistic approaches to political conflict, and, worse still, we will lack the resources to contain and prevent the violent overflow generated by moral *jouissance* and its powerful identifying effects.

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