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Feature Article: Political Theory Revisited

On Politics and Violence: Arendt Contra Fanon

Elizabeth Frazer[a], Kimberly Hutchings[b]
[a]Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford and New College, Oxford, UK.
E-mail: elizabeth.frazer@politics.ox.ac.uk
[b]Department of International Relations, London School of Economics, London, UK.
E-mail: k.hutchings@lse.ac.uk

This paper considers the implications of Hannah Arendt's criticisms of Frantz Fanon and the theories of violence and politics associated with his influence for our understanding of the relationship between those two phenomena. Fanon argues that violence is a means necessary to political action, and also is an organic force or energy. Arendt argues that violence is inherently unpredictable, which means that end reasoning is in any case anti-political, and that it is a profound error to naturalize violence. We evaluate their respective arguments concluding that in her well-founded rejection of the naturalization of violence, Arendt's understanding of the embodied nature of violence is less insightful than Fanon's.
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Introduction

In this paper, we address the question of how to theorize the relation between violence and politics.[1] We do this, here, by way of a consideration specifically of Hannah Arendt's criticism of Frantz Fanon and the tradition of thinking about revolutionary violence with which she associates him. Arendt's criticism of the Fanonian approach to violence brings into clear view a number of difficulties with normative and descriptive theory of violence in politics. In the central sections of the paper we focus, accordingly, on Fanon's theory of violence as that is articulated in *The Wretched of the Earth*, and on Arendt's criticism of Fanon as that is articulated in *On Violence*.[2] To begin with, though, we want to put Fanon's and Arendt's respective accounts of politics and violence into a wider context of thought and theory. For some political theorists and philosophers, it is taken for granted, one way or another, that violence and politics are inextricably intertwined. For others, it is crucial to keep the two clearly apart, and to set politics up — conceptually, theoretically, practically — as antithetical to violence.

Under the first head, we can identify a tradition of thinking in which political power is the power to dominate — to dominate a territory and the people and other resources in it. Machiavelli argues that a successful prince must be willing to use violence judiciously (Machiavelli, 1961, 95–98). Hobbes argues that the power of the artificial body that can satisfactorily achieve this domination must be centred on the power of the sword (Hobbes, 1996, 116–121). In Weber's theory, political action is the domination of a territory by the means of violence. Political actors, including modern states, can have all sorts of ends in view — justice, peace, the glory of the state. What distinguishes them from other kinds of actor (economic actors, for instance, or religious authorities) is the use of violence (Weber, 1978, 54–55).[3] Modern states are special because they successfully monopolize the legitimate (that is to say, justified) use of violence.

Machiavelli, Hobbes and Weber (and others) look at politics, more or less, from the point of view of the political dominator, the state organization. A theoretical and political reflex of this position looks at politics from the point of view of the dominated, the oppressed. From this point of view, numerous thinkers focus on revolutionary violence — the violence that must be used in resistance to and defeat of oppression. In the Marxist revolutionary tradition, the violence of the political economic domination and exploitation of the working class by the capitalist state must and will be resisted and eventually overthrown by concerted, and violent, action by the revolutionary working class (Marx, 1978). Sorel distinguishes between the violence of the state, government, established political parties, and implicated trades unions, and the violence of the proletariat (Sorel, 1999, 39, 62, 78, 200, 280). This distinction between progressive violence for freedom and repressive violence for domination is explored and developed by Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir, Fanon, and Sartre (de Beauvoir, 1948, 98–99; Fanon, 1961, 28; Sartre, 1961, 15–21; Merleau-Ponty, 1969, xviii, 107). Through this tradition runs the theme, too, of the existential significance of violence, both for oppressors and oppressed. Human life is defined by freedom, the necessity to choose, an inescapable project of transcendence of the ties — physical, social, political — that thwart freedom. Violence for freedom, then, goes beyond the straightforward means to an independently conceived ends. Rather, as we shall see, it is thought rather as the expression of human freedom, a self re-creation, in Sartre's words (Sartre, 1961, 18).

It must by no means be inferred that for these thinkers, either the statists or the anti-statists as we might call them, that violence is unproblematically associated with politics. On the contrary, their realistic or existentialist squaring up to face violence is consistent with a variety of expressions of discomfort, and a variety of ways of attempting to deal with this trouble. For Weber, for instance, the association between politics and violence means that 'the politician' is a tragic figure, courageous enough to take on the violence of

politics, and courageous enough, also, to see that he might well be damned by its effects (Weber, 1994, 265, 367). The distinction between (bad) violence for domination and (good) violence for freedom does not fully satisfactorily resolve the troubling nature of violence for the existentialists either — they too pick up the Weberian theme of tragedy (Merleau-Ponty, 1969, xxxix). The uncertainty of cause and effect, and hence the fragility of instrumental justifications of violence, are a central counter in Beauvoir's ethics of ambiguity (de Beauvoir, 1948, 7).

In another tradition of political thought, though, this damning, polluting, troubling nature of violence issues in attempts to expunge it from the realm of politics. In the long tradition of liberal, contractual political theory, the question of the circumstances in which rulers may justifiably be overthrown is closely and complexly connected with the question of the legitimate establishment of political power. For Locke, political power is 'the power of life and death' (Locke, 1960, 308). Twentieth-century liberal contract theories, such as those of Rawls and Nozick, set out how individuals could rationally agree to the constitution and establishment of laws (Nozick, 1974, 5; Rawls, 1999, 10, 514). Theories of deliberative democracy set out how public reason and deliberation could bring people to a point where they could agree to laws or other measures (Habermas, 1996, 170–172; Habermas, 1990, 94; Rawls, 1993, 226; Guttman and Thompson, 1996, 14–16). Thus, the constitution of state, the pursuit of public policy by legislation, executive action, and administration, and by extension the competition for the power to govern this duly constituted polity, can, in theory, at least be agreed to purely rationally. Hence they are justifiable on the grounds that rational persons would, in the right circumstances, agree to the laws and other measures that constrain them. So citizens can be motivated to abide by duly agreed, legitimate measures, legal and administrative.

A theory, in other words, of politics without violence. That is the theory, at least. Critics insist that all this theory does is deny the violence that is inextricably bound up with politics. There is violence not least in the institutions of punishment that even this ideally constituted state reserves to itself to deal with transgressors (cf. Locke, 1960, 428; Honig, 1993, 141–146). The polity has to treat as adversary those who do not subscribe to the fundamental values that shape the constitution (Mouffe, 1993, 4, 57, 70).

The issue here is to some extent conceptual. Politics is defined as a process — policy making, conciliation, law making, executive action and administration — which is based, in this theory, on discourse and reason, both of which are defined as uncoercive. The violence of punishment, and for defence, is, on this view, another matter, not itself part of the political process. Of course, another way of looking at it is that violence is, as it were, politics' constitutive outside. It sets the limits of politics, to be sure, but a genuine philosophical question

arises whether the limit is, or is not, part of the very thing it limits. This is not simply a conceptual matter, however. It has substantive implications when we come to consider the question of the uses of violence in politics and for political purposes. This is an issue we take up in a later section.

So far, then, we have met approaches to politics and violence, which accept violence as a necessary aspect of politics, whether that is thought of primarily as domination of people and territory, or as resistance to and attempts to end such domination. To different extents, these theorists acknowledge the deplorable nature of violence, and set out to justify it. This sense of repulsion at violence underpins the alternative liberal and socialist projects of constructing society and government where violence is marginalized, at most held in reserve for the purposes of punishment and defence. All of these projects rely, to some extent, on distinguishing between justifiable and unjustifiable, legitimate and illegitimate, good and bad forms and uses of violence. Of course, to these we must add pacifist theories that seriously argue that uses of violence are never justifiable (Tolstoy, 1987, 162–164, 172; Ruddick, 1995, 137–139). In this perspective violence is condemned, not for what it is used for but as a form of action in itself. To the extent that politics is identified with violence — the violence of the state, of social order, of law and punishment, the violence of a certain kind of resistance — then pacifism involves a rejection of politics. To the extent that ‘politics’ can be idealized in a different way, then pacifism requires a radical re-imagining of society and polity.

In what follows we trace how these various accounts of the relationship between politics and violence are taken on and criticized by Fanon and Arendt. Fanon attacks the realist account, which associates politics with violent domination, and argues for the justification of violent resistance. He also attacks the liberal parliamentary form of party politics that purports to eschew violence but, according to him, cannot. Fanon envisages a new liberationist form of politics that is free of violence, but this new time for humanity can only be realized, according to him, by violence. This violence is, to begin with, immanent in political structures of power; second, it is embodied and libidinal — and in both senses it is *necessary* as a route towards a better world. Arendt’s criticism of Fanon offers significant insights into the problems with instrumentalist justifications of violence, and with the identification of violence with organic, libidinal energy. Her own view builds on an ideal of politics which is, indeed, absolutely free of violence. She attempts, though, to avoid the liberal solution of marginalizing and effectively denying violence; and she also eschews any form of pacifism.

Arendt and Fanon offer opposed arguments about the relation between politics and violence. It seems we have to choose between seeing violence as a ‘necessary’ aspect of politics, and seeing violence as destructive of politics. We

argue, however, that this either/or construction of the two thinkers' positions is misleading. On examination, the implications of both Fanon's and Arendt's analyses unsettle any clear-cut distinction between them. Fanon gives us grounds for distrusting violence as a route to freedom, and Arendtian politics remains haunted by the violence it supposedly excludes. It is Fanon's work that provides the best clues as to why neither his nor Arendt's accounts of politics and violence satisfactorily settles the question of the relation between them. Because, whatever his explicit claims, Fanon's work demonstrates repeatedly that violence is not a discrete instrument to be used for individual or collective good. It is embodied and embedded in the lives of individuals and communities.

Fanon

In Fanon's theory, there are three kinds of 'politics'. First is politics as domination, where the capacity to dominate rests on the mechanisms of capitalist and colonial exploitation, their associated modes of oppression, and the imbrication of violence in these. Second is the corrupt party politics of emerging elites. This ineffectually tries to ignore the reality of colonial violence and the necessity of revolutionary violence alike in a vain hope for peaceful settlement. Its practitioners espouse the peacability of the profit maker. Third, there is the virtuous politics of the people. In this an ethical use of violence is possible. Further, it models and presages a new form of polity without violence, a new world for humanity.

In the struggle for freedom, at the inception of decolonization, political parties will emerge as intellectual and commercial elites among colonized people see new opportunities and attempt to formulate new aims. Political parties are based on, and further, the interests of people who have been aligned with, because they have done jobs necessary to, the colonial system. Hence, a repeated pattern of conflict and alienation is set up. The political parties are alienated from and distrustful of the rural people, conflict arises between these new would be leaders and dominators and traditional authorities, there will be conflicts between trades unionists and the national middle class, intellectuals will come into conflict with the party machine (Fanon, 2001, 86–91, 97–99). Political leaders cannot maintain their moral authority in the face of economic failure and depredations by capitalists whether domestic or foreign; so leadership turns into a rapacious corrupt dictatorship (133–138). Party politics, then, in the colonial context at least, is theorized by Fanon to be futile at best, to incubate evil at worst. The problem is that the elites are looking above all for opportunities for profit, and to preside over the state in the stead of the colonial rulers. They are committed to taking over the state structure intact,

and accordingly reformist in their attitudes. There is, of course, complicity between capitalism and violence, but the party elites allow themselves to be incorporated into the capitalists' and colonialists' desire for a 'settlement'. They cannot face up to the reality of violence. They deny the violence of the structure they are implicated in. They might opportunistically use aggressive and even violent words for their own rhetorical political purposes, but they just cannot see that anti-colonial, anti-capitalist violence is in the interests of the people (46–51). This refusal to deal honestly with violence has disastrous consequences. Politics in this sense fosters violence even as it purportedly rejects and marginalizes it.

It is important to recognize that, notwithstanding the contempt for middle class, capitalist, professional and political elites that Fanon articulates, he is not blaming them for the violence and corruption that attend their political actions. His analysis over all is structuralist, and the argument of the book is presented in the form of a 'stage theory'. Colonialism, at the outset, 'is violence in its natural state, and will only yield when confronted with greater violence' (48). Colonization and structured careless brutality breeds resentment and the libidinous development of violence. This reactive violence is rejected by the elites and political parties, which causes further alienation and organized popular violence against the initial brutality of the colonial regime. At some point, the dialectic can turn on to a redemptive path. Political education can transform the violent man into the citizen soldier. Finally, he analyses the dialectic between self, humanity, nationality and international consciousness. Thus, at last we have a vision of national consciousness free from the European colonial heritage.

But it is notable that every single stage, and every single nexus between stage and stage in these structural narratives, is shot through with violence. The initial move, colonialism, inserts violence into the world. Thereafter the dialectic of oppression, resistance, and even the final achievement of freedom, is a murderous process. Fanon's analysis is presented in the style of science. The present continuous tense communicates the causal connections between stage and stage as universally applicable. Causal connections are specified at every level — political and historical setting, interpersonal encounters at the level of the social network, down to the intra-personal level of emotional reaction and motivation. In *Black Skin White Masks* discourses of superiority and inferiority are embodied in desire and discontent, in neurosis (Fanon, 1952, passim). In *The Wretched of the Earth* political and economic structures of exploitation and oppression are embodied in rage and resentment, and finally in pathologies of body and mind (Fanon, 2001, 200–202ff). It is notable that the discursive effects on psyche that Fanon sets out in *Black Skin White Masks* (published in 1952) are by the time of *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) seen by him as forms of violence. For Fanon violence is structurally present,

and cannot be defeated except by structural transformation, which party political action cannot bring about.

Violence for Fanon is physical violence — the infliction or threat of infliction of painful injury, by instruments like whips, bayonets, guns and fists. This physical violence pervades every aspect of the colonial world, it pervades even any peace (Fanon, 2001, 56, 64). Violence is inherent in the apartheid ordering and control of populations (p. 29), in dance, religious ecstasy and sexuality as that is acted out by oppressed people (p. 43), in recruitment for war (p. 86), and in the violence to truth of lies and the judging and classification of African people by Western disciplines (pp. 46, 244). To this structured physical violence, and its corruption of all other bodily, social and psychological processes so that they too are violent, Fanon argues that the only response is violence. That is, it is non-optional at the level of human motivation and action. As we have seen, he also thinks that the logic of colonialism, and decolonization, and the responses and actions of colonized people, especially elites, make violence inevitable — everything they do, whether aimed at amelioration or exploitation, whether well intentioned or badly, will result in the escalation and continuation of violent action, whether organized or disorganized.

The redemptive aspect of Fanon's reading of violence is the possibility that violence may be educated. The violence of the colonized is a reactive violence, but it cannot be solely fed by resentment and anger. It must recognize itself as the source of a new world, a new order — it must become strategic and positively instrumental (p. 111). It is in connection with this thought that Fanon introduces the third meaning of 'politics'. Oppressed, colonized people, although they are brutalized and have violence inflicted on them, are not frightened or deflected — 'all their recent history has prepared them to understand and grasp the situation' (p. 63). They understand what is going on 'for they can unmask the forces working behind' the appearances, behind the actions of their leaders. 'The native and the underdeveloped man are today political animals in the most universal sense of the word' (p. 64).

Here 'political' does not connote the vacillation, compromise, self and partial interest, which are the essential characteristics of party politics, and which doom it to corruption, impotence and bloodshed. Rather, political here connotes that public consciousness, wisdom and understanding of how things really are. Violence can be embodied in a creative way. It is this embodied violence, the

> politics of leaders and organisers living inside history who lead with their brains and their muscle in the fight for freedom . that . makes it possible for the masses to understand social truths (pp. 117–118).

Politics now connotes a capacity for organization and collective action, such as is associated with the tradition of political virtue.

> There must be a basis; there must be cells that supply content and life. The masses should be able to meet together, discuss, propose and receive directions. The citizens should be able to speak, to express themselves and put forward new ideas. The branch meeting and the committee meeting are liturgical acts. They are privileged occasions given to a human being to listen and to speak. At each meeting, the brain increases its means of participation and the eye discovers a landscape more and more in keeping with human dignity (p. 157).

This vision of political organization is striking for several things. First, note the allusion to 'liturgy', the identification of a certain kind of humanity with the sacred. This speaks to Fanon's existentialist commitment to the possibility, at least, of a transcendent freedom. Second, the passage envisions an unalienated communication between persons. Third, it is strikingly like Arendt's ideal of political action and power, and especially her model of council politics, which we discuss in the next section. Nevertheless, for Fanon there is no question but, fourth, that this ideal of politics is intrinsically connected to the recognition that violence is the only way to pursue the project of decolonization.

We are given two reasons for this all the way through his argument. Firstly, violence is necessary because it works, in other words it has the power to genuinely transform the world. The dialectical story that he tells, the violent process toward (in the right conditions) freedom and a new kind of peace and humanity shows us that. Secondly, violence is necessary because the world is already violent, and, once unleashed, violent actions can only be countered by violent reactions. The bungled misunderstandings of the party elites are as necessary, on this view, as is the inevitably chaotic, traumatic, more or less uncontrollable participation in violence by the very people whose deliberations and meetings encompass, immanently so to speak, the possibility of a transformed human politics.

In Fanon's analysis therefore, violence is conceptualized in two predominant ways. Firstly, it is an instrument for achieving and sustaining political power — that is, the power to rule. This rule can, of course, be colonial, exploitative and oppressive; or it could be self-determining, co-operative, and liberationist, based on genuine people and genuine leaders (pp. 117, 198–199). Secondly, violence is a *sui generis* force or energy. At the level of the individual it is 'cleansing' (p. 74). As an instrument, violence has the capacity to make the world. As an energy it operates analogously with physical laws, in which the imposition of force provokes a reaction. This may either be directed inwardly and self-destructively by the oppressed, or productively directed against the

oppressor. For Fanon, the instrumental character of violence works in tandem with violence in its libidinal sense as a powerful, natural energy, which can be channelled to create a new and better world. So that, throughout his analysis, a strategic argument for violence as the only effective way of getting rid of the colonial power is reinforced by a reactive argument, in which the colonized need to perpetrate violence against the colonizer as the only way of expressing (getting rid of) the violence that they have suffered. At the same time, however, Fanon's analysis also points to tensions between these two ways of conceptualizing, and justifying, violence.

As an instrument, violence is understood as a tool that can be used and then abandoned, which is of course why it is possible that violent revolution can nevertheless be the way to a new and peaceful world. As a libidinal energy, violence is about *being* rather than *doing*. It is a force that is inherent in colonial structures of oppression, in everyday colonial life, in the psyche of the native turned citizen-soldier. Fanon's argument is that this violence of being is a condition for the productive use of violence as a political instrument, providing the momentum motivating the colonized to do what is necessary to overthrow the oppressor, and thereby cleanse both themselves and their world of violence (p. 237). However, his representations of perpetrators and victims of violence in *The Wretched of the Earth* do not suggest this comfortable conclusion. In particular in Chapter 5, which deals with mental disorders on both sides of the Algerian war, the idea that using violence may be a way to escape being in violence is countered by case after case in which people remain trapped in the violence they have inflicted and suffered. Although Fanon is adamant that the cure for the pathologies of colonialism and anti-colonial war will be found in the future built by anti-colonial violence, his vivid accounts of the lives of his patients and the broader family and social relations in which they are embedded suggests an alternative conclusion, in Fanon's own words that 'the future of such patients is mortgaged' (p. 203).

Arendt

Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* was published in French (*Damnés de la Terre)* in 1961 (the year of his death) and in English in the US and UK in 1965. Arendt's *On Violence* was published in 1969, and was a response to the events in the universities in 1968 but also to increasing violence both for and against civil rights for black people, and to rising levels of terrorism in Europe and the US. In *On Violence* Arendt spends a good deal of time responding to Fanon's book.[4] Her reading of Fanon is frequently qualified by a tendency to accuse other members of the existentialist tradition with which she identifies Fanon, as being more extreme than Fanon himself. For instance, Arendt remarks of

Sartre's Preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, that it 'goes much farther in [its] glorification of violence than Sorel in his famous *Reflections on Violence* — farther than Fanon himself, whose argument [Sartre] wishes to bring to its conclusion' (Arendt, 1969, 12). In spite of this, however, it is clear that Arendt sees the fundamental assumptions of Fanon's theories of politics and revolutionary change as mistaken. He may not be as extreme as Sartre, but he still misunderstands the nature of politics and of violence and the relation between them.

In *On Violence* as in her other works Arendt alludes repeatedly to an ideal of political life:

> What makes a man a political being is his faculty of action; it enables him to get together with his peers, to act in concert, and to reach out for goals and enterprises that would never enter his mind, let alone the desires of his heart, had he not been given this gift — to embark on something new. Philosophically speaking, to act is the human answer to the condition of natality (p. 142).

In *The Human Condition* the capacity for action (the political capacity par excellence) is defined in part by its distinction from the human capacities for labour (processes that reproduce material conditions for existence and are in principle inexhaustible) and work (the capacity to make objects, to fabricate, to work on the world instrumentally to produce finite ends) (Arendt, 1958, 9). A concrete model that instantiates this faculty of action and birth is the council system: 'the always defeated but only authentic outgrowth of every revolution since the eighteenth century' (Arendt, 1969, 22). In such a political organization, where individuals meet responsibly to decide and act on matters of common concern and of public significance, people will have the chance to understand what is the meaning of the *res publica* (p. 78).

This ideal of politics as action in the public sphere is at the heart of Arendt's account of violence and of her critique of existing ways of conceptualizing the relationship between violence and politics. She takes issue with the way traditions of political thought and theory treat violence as integral to politics. Theorists from Hobbes to Weber see violence as the ultimate power (p. 38), and indeed as necessary for political order, for the word without the sword is nothing (p. 5). It is from this train of thinking that we get the ideas that war is politics continued by other means, in Clausewitz's account, or that power grows out of the barrel of a gun as according to Mao (p. 11). Instrumental justifications and celebrations of revolutionary violence are a response to this kind of view. According to Arendt, these arguments are based on a fundamental confusion between political action and fabrication. The whole point about action is that it is not predictable in its outcomes. When we act, in contrast to when we make, we cannot have a finished product in view, and

action, unlike fabrication, does not encompass bringing an envisaged product into being. Violence is ruled by means-end reasoning (pp. 4, 79). It is assumed that, as with the making of an object, the use of certain tools will bring about a particular outcome. But the problem with violence, as opposed to modes of fabrication, is that the end to which it is directed is always in danger of being overwhelmed by the means it justifies. All human action (including political action) is unpredictable, but to this unpredictability violence brings a significant additional element of arbitrariness (p. 4). It might 'pay', but it pays indiscriminately. The most probable change it will bring about is the change to a more violent world (p. 80). To the extent that the world becomes more violent, the possibilities for politics are reduced and corrupted.

Arendt's reading of the history of political thought divides political theories into two: those that focus on the question 'who rules?' and those that do not. 'Who rules?' is connected with an idea that government itself just is the rule of man over man. Politics, on this view, is a matter of commandment and obedience. This might be obedience to men, or obedience to laws, or even obedience to bureaucratic procedures, which is to say to 'nobody'. Whichever, the temptation is to see 'power' as that which ensures the obedience which is commanded. Further, it is tempting to see violence as one form of that power (pp. 36–40). Violence, power and force can be seen as 'the same' because they have 'the same function' (p. 43). However, there is, Arendt insists, an alternative tradition of political thought, according to which there is no continuity between obedience to the command of a person and 'obedience' to laws (p. 41). Rather, there is a radical discontinuity. 'Obedience' to laws is not so much obedience as support for the laws, the enactment of the citizens' consent to the laws. And this support is never unquestioning — unlike the 'automatic' sense in which I might submit to the person with a gun who takes my handbag (p. 41).

Power, she goes on to say, relies on numbers of persons, whereas violence relies on implements. The extreme form of violence is one or a small number against all (the terrorists, the violent state apparatus); the extreme form of power is all against one (p. 42). Often people complain that a small number or a single person have spoiled things, by disrupting a class, or a meeting, or a way of life. They are blamed for their aggression, or violence, or unreasonableness. But such events should be interpreted as the majority refusing to use its power to stop the so-called aggressor. Indeed, they are effectively taking sides with the minority (p. 42). Power is the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. To say that someone is 'in power' is more properly to say that someone is empowered by a certain number of people (p. 44). Individuals have strength, which can be deployed instrumentally. Violence, with its implements, multiplies natural strength (p. 46). Power, unlike strength and unlike violence, cannot be thought of instrumentally. It is not a means to an end, but is the condition that

enables people to think and act — including thinking and acting in terms of means and ends, that is instrumentally. Against the run of the Weberian view, Arendt argues that it follows from this alternative philosophical and theoretical framework that no government based exclusively on the means of violence has ever existed. And she infers from this that power is the essence of all government, and violence is not (p. 50).

In addition to this predominant tradition of political theory, which confuses action with fabrication, there is another equally dangerous tradition. This other tradition identifies violence with natural drives. So it confuses action with biological processes, the realm of reproduction rather than production (pp. 62–63). According to Arendt, this is part of a tendency in Western thought to be dominated by the notion of infinite process, whether in socio-biology or theories of history (pp. 60, 30). Arendt is keen to point out that Marx's own work does not necessarily support this tendency. However, there is no doubt that Marx's focus on material production as the motor of historical development lends itself to neo-Darwinian interpretations of the meaning of human life (p. 26). These ideas manifest themselves not only in socio-biological arguments that naturalize human aggression, but also in revolutionary theories that adopt and adapt them. One such example is the way in which Bergson's notion of the *élan vital* is taken up in the revolutionary syndicalism of Sorel, which Arendt identifies as inspirational for Sartre and Fanon (pp. 69–70).

Arendt makes two responses to this kind of thinking. First, she argues that the alleged factors of 'nature' or 'biology' are fallacious and irrelevant. Insofar as these theories align human behaviour with 'beastly' they are just wrong. Rage and the like are emotional reactions to injustice or to hypocrisy. They are distinctively human responses (p. 65). Second, they are also fundamentally non-political; and human associations that are based on them are essentially anti-political. Arendt includes among such associations the kinds of fraternal solidarity typical of violent revolutionary groups and suicide squads (p. 67). Her point is that such organizations and motivations are by definition only transitory. They are unstable, secret and exclusive. Political organization, by contrast, is about building enduring, public and inclusive structures within which action may flourish. For Arendt the most anti-political aspect of human life is death, the absolute end to the individual's capacity for new beginning, which is essential to politics. How wrong, then, any identification of politics with death. But of course, we do find this identification in the suicide bombers' solidarity in the face of death. And there it is too in the Hobbesian account of sovereign authority as the power over life and death (p. 68).

Arendt's focus on life (as opposed to death) and on acting in concert (as opposed to in competition) gives a particular inflexion to her criticism of violence. She resists the kind of straightforwardly instrumentalist reasoning about uses of violence associated with realist political thinkers. She also argues

against the idea that violence is natural for human beings because of our biological nature. However, this does not mean that Arendt rejects the role of violence altogether. She is by no means a pacifist.

She argues that although violence can never be legitimate, it may nevertheless sometimes be justified (p. 52). This is because there is not a political solution to every problem, sometimes the only solution to injustice or horror is the violent one. In *On Violence*, there are two contexts in which violence is presented as justifiable. Firstly, it may be justified as a response to extreme injustice (p. 64). Secondly, it may be justified insofar as it opens up the space for politics (p. 79). Both of these justifications are bound up with a sense of violence as having a certain kind of effectiveness, and also being appropriate in certain contexts. Violence can make things happen in the immediate sense. It is also the right response, for instance, to the victimization of the innocent. Arendt argues that the use of non-violence as a tactic requires, as its pre-requisite, that there already be some space of politics and therefore for power. Ghandi's campaign, she suggests, could not have been effective had he been faced with a more purely anti-political regime, such as Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia (p. 53). In the latter contexts violence would be necessary in order to make politics possible.

Nevertheless, regardless of whether violence may have its uses and justifications in relation to politics, the crucial point is that it should never be conflated with politics itself. Politics is conceptually and theoretically distinct from violence which, for Arendt, at best is a short-term solution, and a solution only of sorts. It is in its nature to be so, because the only possible predictive capability we have regarding the outcomes of violence are its immediate effects. We know that the blow will knock out the adversary. Beyond that, our capacity to use violence instrumentally is decidedly limited (p. 80).

Arendt Contra Fanon

Fanon understands and justifies violence in two main ways. First, it is a means necessary to political action — that is, his justification is instrumental. Second, it is an organic force or energy that follows its own logic. Fanon can be interpreted in this regard as a structuralist, as we have suggested. But his account of how structure works makes reference to physiological processes. This can be read as a kind of justification from naturalness. Arendt attacks both of these lines of argument. In relation to the former, she agrees with an instrumentalist analysis of violence. She is quite clear that violence is essentially the enhancement of natural strength through the use of tools. However, violence is not and cannot be politically instrumental for two reasons. Firstly,

because the instrumental reasoning that underlies the use of violence in politics is antithetical to politics, because it identifies politics mistakenly with the achievement of pre-defined ends. Secondly, in any case, because those who confuse violence with power misunderstand the inherently unpredictable consequences of violence. Particularly in the long term, the means of violence has a tendency to overwhelm the ends for which it is used. Her argument against the identification of violence as a kind of energy or force is more straightforward. The category of violence hovers somewhere between the categories of work and action in Arendt's account. In either case it is bound up with motives and intentions that are not in any sense pre-determined by the workings of natural drives or unconscious libidinal energy. Violence is a product of distinctively human emotions and reasons. It is not reactive but intentional, not biological in the conventional understanding of what that means, but ethical.

These two arguments contra Fanon are undoubtedly powerful. Her arguments against claims as to the political instrumentality of violence draw attention to the flaws in the kind of means end reasoning on which such claims rely. She is quite right to insist on the absurdity of arguments that rest on the idea that we can rely on the subordination of means to ends and on the certainty of outcomes of human action, whether in politics or in any other sphere. Arguments from 'nature', whether that is a libidinal version like Fanon's or the later zoological sociobiology that Arendt also addresses (pp. 59–61) help to render violence in the political sphere unquestionable by reducing it to a necessary aspect of the human condition.

However, there are also problems with Arendt's argument. The theoretical relationship between politics and violence is such that the clear conceptual distinction between them is problematic. Further, although she rejects instrumental justifications of violence in politics, she analyses violence itself purely in instrumental terms. In contrast to Fanon's analysis of violence, and his linking of this to embodied subjectivity, Arendt's account, despite her focus on institutions, encounter, and natality, is abstract and disembodied by comparison.

Arendt's method is to begin by drawing conceptual distinctions, which are a prerequisite for normative arguments about political life. In *On Violence*, she makes clear at the outset that the categorical distinctions she draws are ideal types, always mixed together in practice. In other words, it is extremely rare to find power or violence in pure form, they are almost always tangled together (p. 52). However, this mixing in practice is accompanied in Arendt's text by theoretical imbrication of the two concepts. Violence is categorically distinguished from power; however, power is a condition for violence, and equally violence may be a condition for power. Power conditions violence in the sense, Arendt argues, that it underlies all collective action (p. 51). Further,

without power, without action in concert, there can be no means ends reasoning such as is necessary to utilize violence in pursuit of collective ends. Violence can condition power, on the other hand, in the sense that it can clear the way for power, making politics possible in contexts from which it has been squeezed out (pp. 52–54).

But if we take this seriously as a theory of politics and violence, then it looks as though Arendt's strictures about what is and what is not properly political are problematic. She insists that violence can never generate power (p. 56). However, if it can clear the way for power, then it must be describable as having political effects. Arendt certainly wants to say that it is not political, strictly grammatically speaking. But there seems to be no particular reason, on just this account, why political actors should reject non-political (strictly speaking) actions if they bring about desired political effects. Such as the one that she has in view — making the public world in which political action is possible. Of course, for the most part Arendt argues that violence is politically ineffective. However, the concession that violence might be the only way significantly weakens this strand of her argument.

This second strand of her critique sets out to show both why people might think of violence as a political instrument, and why they are wrong to do so. The problem, according to her, is that they have confused violence with power. This confusion ultimately derives from a misunderstanding of politics, which is wrongly thought of as to do with the question of rule. Unlike power, violence must be thought of as an instrument or tool. It is here that it becomes very important that agents really understand the nature of violence and therefore its limitations. The problems with violence lie in the discrepancies between its intended and its actual outcomes or effects. It is difficult to disagree with the argument that the destructiveness of violence is always likely to overwhelm the purposes for which it is being used. However, in identifying violence with an instrument or tool, Arendt's argument is, we would argue, partial. It misses the link between violence as doing and violence as being, which is much better captured by Fanon. And, because of this, Arent's conclusions are practically permissive as to the role of violence in politics.

Arendt's argument is partial because violence is not actually very much like a tool at all. Understanding violence in this way can suggest that there is no essential connection between violence and either the persons who use it or the persons it is used against. It also suggests that violence can be picked up and put down in the same manner as we might pick up or put down a screwdriver or a hammer. But, there are obvious problems with this way of thinking when we take into account that our bodies themselves are prime instruments of violence. A more adequate account of violence, as Fanon might have suggested had he lived to respond to Arendt's criticisms, would recognize that it plays a structuring role in the ways individual and collective

actors are produced and reproduced in both private and public domains of power.

When Arendt criticizes the conflation of violence with politics, she identifies this as a mistake on the part of political actors. She addresses the reasons why this mistake may have happened. It could be because the efficacy of violence in the short term is mistaken for its efficacy in general. Or the mistake could lie in an illegitimate generalization of a justifiable emotional reaction to injustice and hypocrisy. But this account individualizes responsibility for violence and ignores the ways in which individuals are invested in the repertoires of violence prior to any decisions being taken about the use of violence in this or that instance. The repertoires of violence are at work in the meaning of manhood, womanhood and citizenship, and they are at work in the economic, social and political institutions of all known societies. If one is to unravel the idea that violence works, then one must unravel the extraordinary and complex ideational and material infrastructure needed to sustain a world in which the fact that violence works is self-evident. Arendt's unwillingness to address this infrastructure, which follows from her resistance to any account of humanity that seems to undermine the *sui generis* character of action, leaves her analysis much closer to the traditions of *realpolitik* and just war theory than one would expect, given her emphasis on the conceptual detachment of violence from political power proper.

It is in his account of the embeddedness of violence in the production of both individual and collective political actors that Fanon's argument comes closer than Arendt's to grasping the link between violence and politics. Whatever the shortcomings of his instrumental justifications and psychoanalytic explanations for political violence, Fanon is much more attuned than Arendt to violence as a mode of being in the world. This includes an understanding of how violence is embodied. This is both in the immediate physical experiences of inflicting and suffering violence, and in ongoing bodily existence and orientation. Crucially, as we have seen, embodied persons inhabit structured institutions, regimes, ways of life. In *Black Skin White Masks* Fanon sets out the discourses, materialized in texts, which affect body and motivation, which structure and enculturate agents, and produce and reproduce the discourses (Fanon, 1952, 20, 25, 34, 55ff). In the final chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*, he charts the presuppositions and effects of violence, psychological, emotional, social, and physical for perpetrators and victims (Fanon, 2001, 200–250). He shows how the practice of violence as a political technique is secured only through the production of particular kinds and inter-relations of subjects. The torturer is unable to stop hearing the screams. A child is unable to grasp that the killing of a friend on grounds of enemy identity might be wrong. These examples give indirect evidence of the amount of work needed to render torturing and killing intelligible as political techniques. Political power works

here through the body not only repressively and instrumentally but also, in a Foucauldian sense, productively.

In this final chapter, the force of Fanon's earlier arguments, that violence will work to overthrow colonial power or that it can be canalized for constructive purposes, is undermined. Paradoxically, the argument that begins as the celebration of revolutionary violence ends up by drawing attention to the corrupting and debilitating effects of violence, whether reactionary or revolutionary, on both perpetrators and victims. By contrast, Arendt, who seems at the outset to be more thorough-goingly resistant to any arguments for the necessity, inevitability or usefulness of violence, accepts that violence may sometimes be the only way to achieve justice.

Conclusion

Fanon and Arendt begin by offering us alternative theorizations of the relation between politics and violence. In the case of Fanon, violence is an instrument for the achievement of political ends, and it is also a libidinal drive natural to all human beings and capable of being channelled for good or ill. In the case of Arendt, violence in itself is by definition anti-political. This is because violence, in which obedience is secured through coercion, is the opposite of power, which is based on free consent. We have suggested in our discussion of these two theorists' work that the insights they provide are in some sense complementary. Arendt's argument gives us a useful corrective to Fanon's instrumental and psychoanalytic claims. Fanon, on the other hand, gives us an equally useful corrective to the abstract and disembodied way in which Arendt thinks about violence as a tool.

We conclude by suggesting that the cases to which Fanon draws attention in the last chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* point to a set of issues about the relation between politics and violence that are not explicitly addressed by either Arendt or Fanon, nor by any of the thinkers whose approaches to politics and violence frame Arendt's and Fanon's critical contributions. While Fanon acknowledges that the entrenchment of violence in individual and collective life makes revolutionary violence possible, he fails to explain how the vicious circle between the doing and 'being' of violence can be broken through the doing of further violence. Meanwhile, Arendt banishes violence from politics conceptually, but fails to engage with the problem how violence might both be, on occasion, constitutive for politics, and not contaminate it. Both Fanon and Arendt are committed to an ideal of politics without violence, whether in the form of the post-colonial, post-European internationalism or of an older style of republicanism. But, in the end, both argue that violence is sometimes the only way in which justice can be done. They are able to do so, because, in spite

of all evidence to the contrary, they argue that it either is, or could be, possible to detach violent doing from violent being, whether at the individual or the collective level. This is a profoundly questionable assumption, one that radically underestimates the levels of ideological and material investment needed to sustain violence as a repertoire for political action. Equally, it is one that also overestimates the capacity of political actors to transcend the repertoire of violence that plays such a major part in constructing and defining the parameters of politics and action in the first place. Fanon uses the metaphor of 'mortgaged' to describe the future of his patients. If we adopt this metaphor, then to use violence as a way forward for politics is equivalent to incurring debt to pay debt. Fanon and Arendt go some way between them to point up the absurdity of this procedure. At the same time, however, neither of them takes seriously enough the question of how the link between violence and politics could be dismantled, and the debt finally settled.

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Notes

1 An early version of this analysis was presented at the conference 'The Barbarisation of Warfare', Wolverhampton University, June 2005. This analysis of Arendt and Fanon was presented to the panel 'Power, Violence and the Body', American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, August 2006. We are grateful to participants at these events for helpful discussion. Kimberly Hutchings benefited from study leave from LSE for the academic year 2005–2006 when a good deal of the research for this paper was conducted. Elizabeth Frazer had study leave from the University of Oxford and New College for autumn 2006, and was a visiting researcher at Cevipof, Centre Recherches de Sciences Po, when this paper was written. We are indebted to these institutions for their support.

2 This paper does not aim produce an exhaustive account of everything that Fanon and Arendt thought about violence; rather it is to focus on this particular dispute, between *The Wretched of the Earth* and *On Violence*, and to consider how it illuminates the troubling normative and phenomenological questions that arise when we consider the relationship between politics and violence. In the context of this paper, we take 'violence' to refer primarily to the intentional infliction of physical injury on others for political purposes, and seek to draw attention to the conditions and the broader effects of such violence for individuals and for social and political structures, institutions and relations.

3 Insofar as economic actors, or religious authorities, have recourse to violence to secure their positions they are acting quasi-politically, we might say. There is a tension or contradiction in Weber's remarks on this subject. He insists that politics is defined solely by its means, and not by its ends (Weber, 1978, 55). But it is clear that, for instance, the economic actor who uses violence is not, just by that fact, a fully political actor (p. 54). Political actors seek control of a territory and its people and resources (p. 55). That is, some ends are implicated. According to this analysis, gangs and bands of warriors are political actors. Of course, the ultimate political actor to date is the modern state that gets to say whether gangs and the like are, or are not, illegitimate (p. 56).

4 Stephen Spender has 12 entries in the index (but six of these are to footnotes), Karl Marx 17 (1), Georges Sorel 9 and Jean-Paul Sartre 7. Frantz Fanon comes third with 10, one of which is to a footnote, but in our rough estimation Fanon takes up more space than anyone else in the text.

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