PREVENTIVE POLITICAL MORALITY AND THE ONTOLOGY OF EVIL: SOME LESSONS FROM LITERATURE AND FILM

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Summary The article uses different discourses on evil from literature and film to probe Derek Edyvane's political theory that builds a preventive political ethics arguing for "sovereignty of evil". The discussion is limited to a specific evil – violence and violent crime – while its essential causes and consequences in nature and society, and the indicated politics to address it, are subsumed under the term ontology. The underlying idea is that Edyvane must first answer more precisely what evil is and how it works in order to make it sovereign. Avoiding the consequences of evil and building a political consensus around great evils presupposes the understanding of their causes. The method of inquiry that analyses fictional material is legitimated by Edyvane's own employing of art and literature in his study, but more importantly, by special quality and insight of classical films and novels that make them useful in the exploratory phase of research that procreates hypotheses to be tested. After different discourses are explored – ones that see nature, society, politics, or all of them, as roots of violent evil and imply different ideas for its control or eradication – and Edyvane's theory is tested against them, a tentative conclusion is reached that political liberalism is perhaps the best thing that we have to date.[*]

Keywords Edyvane, evil, ontology, political theory, political morality, literature, film, violence, crime

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Introduction: Edyvane's Political Theory and the Ontology of Evil

In his recent book about the notorious subject, Terry Eagleton bluntly stated: "The word 'evil' is generally a way of bringing arguments to an end, like a fist in the solar plexus" (Eagleton, 2011: 16). Luckily enough, when bringing evil into political theory, Edyvane in no way wants to bring the argument to an end, either by anachronistic moralizing or by facile demonizing. Instead of that, in the manuscript of his new book on civic virtue, he proposes that evil should become a "sovereign concept" in our thinking about political life, carefully crafting his arguments about politics erected around that central concept. In other words, evil does not serve to end a discussion, but to start one.

Edyvane is interested in developing a viable contemporary conception of political morality. Political morality refers to a set of guidelines for political thinking and acting, which do not necessarily produce a set of precise operational rules, but rather serve to provide general ideas and main directions for collective decision-making. In thinking about political morality, Edyvane adopts a reasonable pluralistic position. Its spirit and vocabulary remind one of Isaiah Berlin's thinking about politics. Since there is no single final solution to political problems, Edyvane advises us to discard the "dubious monistic model" of political morality. However, in making sense of our political experience, the general distinction can be made between preventive and aspirational types of political activity. One seeks either to avoid some evil or to attain some good. Two types of political morality correspond to these activities: preventive political morality and aspirational political morality. Since

he is inaugurating evil as "the sovereign concept", Edyvane is, not surprisingly, interested in the former.

Developing preventive political morality is a task for political theory. Political theorists should do the conceptual work enabling citizens to better understand their political experience and devise a normative framework necessary to govern the community in face of challenges. To be sure, this is in no way an exercise in unconstrained normative idealism. According to Edyvane, relevant political theory must start from existing problems and situations in a society. And this situation is bleak, if not perilous.

Edyvane speaks of "uncertain times" and general disappointment in politics and civil life which has led many to call for fundamental changes in politics and stress the importance of restoration of civic virtue. But the Edyvanean political theorist, working in contemporary liberal democratic societies, has to take into account the fact of pluralism. As acknowledged by Rawls of *Political Liberalism*, the citizens in a liberal democracy are quite far from sharing a single moral vision. Development of any normative political theory that properly addresses contemporary political problems has to start from the fact of nonexistence of overlapping moral consensus. The solution for Edyvane, then, is not to embark on a probably impossible task of finding an ideal political theory of aspirational morality, but to try to build on the preventive side of the coin; that is, to start from the "sense of the great evils that humans do" and try to prevent them. This sense could be common enough, shared by the large majority of citizens, thus enabling us to build some kind of widely acceptable – to paraphrase the subtitle of

Edyvane's study – political ethics for uncertain times.

That conception of political ethics requires evil to become the sovereign concept, both in political theory and in public life (Edyvane, 2012: IV, 20). Edyvane sets to develop the normative ideal of "austere" public life and politics. However, he does not devoid his citizens of hope – a concept that plays an important role in his theory. The body politic should be governed according to a minimal consensus on great evils and threats perceived by the community, hoping for better days to come. Within the framework of preventive political morality, not *attaining good* but *preventing evil* (our new political sovereign) becomes civic virtue of today.

The preceding paragraphs give a short outline of what I see as Edyvane's very stimulating effort. They also set the stage for us to begin a conversation with his political theory. In doing so, we will focus on the concept of evil. But in what sense exactly? In his presentation on Edyvane's manuscript, Elvio Baccarini, political philosopher from Rijeka, gave a tripartite categorization of possible objections to Edyvane's theory, providing us with a good starting point for our discussion.[1] Baccarini's first objection is that sovereign evils are not universally felt as such. His second objection is that proceduralism is not generally accepted as a solution to political problems. The third objection states that even if procedure was accepted, it would not guarantee that evils would be cured.

I am not sure that Edyvane's theory can be singularly interpreted as a proce-

dural political theory, so I am happy to focus on the first general critique, which I find most interesting.[2] It is indeed hard to achieve consensus on political good, but building politics on a consensus on great evils could be an even harder task. To give just a few examples: some perceive the death penalty as ultimate evil, an illegitimate brutal killing by the hand of state, while others see it as a just retribution and a necessary deterrent for the gravest of crimes, such as murder.[3] Some see social policies as a minimal precondition for decent social life and a good way to cure social evils, while other see them as intrusions in freedom – the problem is that they usually demand taxing of the "free market" transactions, and in-

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[1] Elvio Baccarini, *Edyvane's Public Ethics and Political Liberalism*, Rijeka, 20th October 2011.

[2] Baccarini interprets Edyvane's theory as an example of procedural political ethics, not focusing on attaining the good, but on fixing the just procedure (roughly stated, if a procedure is accepted by the parties, then whatever comes out of it is, by definition, *just* and must be accepted by the parties). Edyvane himself sees his position as procedural and defends it as such. But to me it looks much richer, or more demanding in the substantial sense. To avoid aspirational ethics and to discard the ambitious pursuit of the common good can be interpreted as a species of political proceduralism, not fixing the outcomes in the sense of aspirational morality. However, we have the idea of evil and the fundamental supposition that achieving a rough consensus on its sovereignty is possible. In that sense, Edyvane's treatise can be seen as a substantial political endeavor, which is not at all changed by the fact that this substance is "negative" in the sense of seeking evil instead of usual searching for the good.

[3] The conflict is normative and ideological, and as such it is hardly solved by empirically based arguments, e.g. on statistically measured effectiveness of the death penalty as a deterrent for potential murderers.

dividual and corporate income – and as a breeding ground for perverse incentives of bureaucrats and various "social parasites". Instead of preventing social evils, ambitious social policies produce new social evils. Finally, some see religion as an ultimate good and sense provider in the earthly life of the individual, while other see it as a debilitating social evil, an opium for the masses, usually destructive for social peace and rational conflict solving.[4] To cut the long story short, developing a viable shared perception of great evils could be a hard nut to crack.

But even more importantly, if consensus would be achieved on a phenomenon, social practice or object as an evil to be avoided by the means of political action, a further question arises: how does that evil come about? For example, is violent crime with deathly outcomes, a hardly disputable great evil, a consequence of the evildoer's free will or is it a consequence of social conditions and lousy criminal justice policies, or perhaps some other deterministic causal factor? The answer to the second question obviously determines the definition of certain socio-political phenomena, actions or institutions as evil, and it also determines appropriate political means to combat or prevent them. Since we have agreed not to cut the dis-

cussion short by hitting the solar plexus, we should, for a clearer idea of what is at stake with Edyvane's political theory, conduct a short inquiry into the concept of evil. To use a bit more technical term from the history of philosophy and today's meta-theoretical discussions in social sciences, we should define more precisely *the ontology* of evil, i.e. understand its main traits, reasons, causes and possibilities defining it as, or making it "evil". A few preliminary disclaimers and clarifications are necessary.

The term ontology is not used with mystifying pretensions of grasping the fundamental depth of being that could be hiding behind the orthography of the word we chose to highlight. This essay is not a phenomenological exercise in fundamental analytics of being in the world (e.g. Heidegger, 1985: 9, 14; Sutlić, 1989: 71). Nor does it owe any debts, in terms of precise hermeneutics, to the recognized traditions and authors of the ontological enquiries from the history of philosophy. I simply use the term as it is today commonly used in meta-theoretical language of mainstream globalized political science (e.g. Marsh and Furlong, 2002). It denotes entities or, to put it more metaphorically, "building blocks" a theory presupposes: (sometimes complicated) social and political entities are taken to exist "down there" in the world, thus making an essential ingredient of the developed system of elementary categories in a theory. For example, for rational choice theory in economics and political science these blocks are utility maximizing individuals, and for a more or less orthodox variant of Marxism, these are economic classes. These entities have logic, causes and consequences, and certain motives and interests if they are conscious and sentient. Onto-

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[4] Besides drawing a general line between secular atheists and religious believers, one could introduce concrete religious beliefs and institutionalized religions showing even deeper divides and identity clashes, hardly solvable by anything that could be pulled out of a political theorist's rich bag of tricks. Among many other possible examples, the postcolonial partition of India and contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina could offer a rich historic-political insight into the problem.

logy here means not intuitively grasped fundamental essence, but more of a firm and clear theoretical conception explicating the elementary functioning of the analyzed phenomenon.

The alternative way to look at it – perhaps more controversial, but more familiar to the traditional canons of political theory; perhaps narrower, but very illuminating, especially in the discussion on evil – is to evoke Carl Schmitt's treatise *The Concept of the Political*. In the seventh chapter, Schmitt stated that every political theory and idea presupposes a certain anthropology. The controversy here is not in Schmitt's Nazi allegiances, but in his insistence on the statement that all "genuine political theories" see man as evil, in the sense that he is dangerous and unpredictable (Schmitt, 1996: 58-68).[5] A fundamental picture of the subject that fuels political theory – its fundamental anthropological "belief" – is important because it can serve to draw a fundamental distinction between various political theories and ideologies. In that sense, for example, the distinction between Left and Right can be seen as a distinction between proposing anarchism and believing in authority: while Left *ultima linea* believes that political authority interfering in the social sphere, as a potential sphere of freedom of the individuals,[6] induces all kinds of

evil, Right espouses a strong belief that man is more or less naturally evil, i.e. dangerous and inclined to violence, and thus has to be subject to political authority. Depending on the conception of the human subject, the presence of authority, or precisely the opposite – its absence – produces evil. Either way, the ontology of the subject shapes the fundamental logic of a political theory.

The idea in this essay is, then, to probe a bit deeper into the fundamental concepts behind Edyvane's theory in order to get a clearer view of the ontology of evil that should be informing or legitimating the political "institution" of sovereignty of evil. If evil is to be our sovereign, than we should understand it better. The ontology of evil is a term marking our attempt to acquire its precise understanding or to grasp it more thoroughly. The attempt is not constrained only on the "anthropological" question on subjects (it does not necessarily posit in advance that individual subjects are at all important for evil: it could be "soci-

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[5] Leo Strauss elaborated much on this theme in the review of Schmitt's treatise in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft...* (Strauss, 2001a) and in the subsequent short letter he sent to Schmitt (Strauss, 2001b).

[6] The Latin qualification is inserted to suggest that this (Schmittian-Straussian) distinction between Left and Right perhaps applies only if one has in mind the final temporal stage of societal development, or logically postu-

lates a perfect communist society, where ideal social conditions enable true freedom, and human subjects, not being evil as such, act peacefully towards one another, without coercion of the state which has withered away. In the historical meantime, the Rousseauist coercing of the subject to be free and revolutionary collective action in the Marxist tradition (or simply and more mundanely: socialism administered by the state) are more naturally labeled as "leftist", while the above formulations on freedom are more easily associated with Ayn Rand's or Nozick's liberalism or anarchocapitalism, which are usually understood as something on the "Right". Anyway, the precise application of established historical labels is not of the essence for our understanding of ontology and its application in the following analysis.

ety", not "anthropology"). The scope of ontology is a bit wider: when searching for the theoretical core, the important ontological questions seek to find out what are the causes and consequences of evil; what kind of subjects, institutions or, more generally, entities are involved; what kind of actions, motives, causal or moral mechanisms of evildoing are we dealing with? Generally, the question is how and why evil comes about and what to do about it? If we were to sum up the idea of our effort into an aphorism, we should say: first ontology, and only then – political theory.

Eagleton's witty remark is thus again to the point. Its normative implications for political theorists, coming from the unsaid but intended, strongly suggest the importance of an ontological hunt that must be prior to political solutions. The posited *verbum interius*, of course, receives its explicit elaboration in the rest of Eagleton's book. According to Eagleton, evil is an important concept, not at all something to be discarded. We have to know what it is and how it comes about, and, not surprisingly, different people tend to give different answers to these questions. For example, when the array of interesting but not always disciplined associations, sharp and witty remarks[7] finally comes to a conclusion,

Eagleton speaks of "authentic materialism" aware of the limitations of moral actions. Since moral actions depend on the "material", i. e. socioeconomic context, the roots of evil can be traced in the social context. Unlike the proverbial British people evoked by Eagleton, the average man does not display virtue under pressure: human beings are mixed, "morally hybrid" creatures. Accordingly, the biggest evil does not come from evil individuals, but from institutions, vested interests and "anonymous processes" (cf. Eagleton, 2011: 156, 160). Like children, those who are materially deprived and uneducated cannot be evil. The society is to blame for their evil deeds, so societal change is indicated to combat evil.

It can become much more complicated than what this more or less traditional position on the Left suggests, un-

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[7] The "Žižekian" style has become a good selling commodity in contemporary theoretical production aiming for the wider audience, at least in scholarship in cultural studies and literary criticism, which could in its major part perhaps be politically subsumed under the label of Postmodern Left. For whether this theoretically and/or politically applies to Eagleton's works, cf. his definition of postmodernism in *After Theory* (Eagleton, 2005: 20). To anticipate the discussion in the main section of the essay, for Žižek's

own position on violence, cf. Žižek (2008), where he discards the juxtaposition of blaming the human nature for violence against injustices of society, and instead speaks of the truly violent "nature" of competitive capitalism that produces violence (*ibid.*: 82). On the other hand, Žižek's own ontological position is that nature is chaotic: "Nature brings no equilibrium (...) Nature is one big catastrophe", but from which he metaphysically excludes humans, who are, according to Sartre, whom Žižek paraphrases, "radically condemned to freedom" (*Nedjeljom u 2* [Sunday at Two, A Croatian National TV Sunday Talk Show], 2007, part 3 of 7 parts available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tV1aSNzh7xU&feature=related). In the book on violence, Žižek gives a strikingly honest description of his authorial technique: "It would be all too easy to score points in this debate using witty reversals which can go on indefinitely" (Žižek, 2008: 99; translation taken from the English version of the book on Amazon, p. 98).

ambiguously tracing the causes of evil in unjust society and giving limited autonomy to moral actions of the individuals. A good illustration of this (and an early hint of our method) can be found in Fritz Lang's classic thriller film *M* from 1931 that tackles the problem of evil. The film tells the tale of a compulsive serial killer of young girls, perhaps a pedophile, who is finally caught in orchestrated action of "normal" criminals (smugglers, thieves, pimps, etc.), irritated by police pressure and the bad name that the vicious killer gives to all the "decent criminals". He is judged in front of the crime syndicate, in a lynching atmosphere, and saved by the police in the last moment. In a convincing monologue, the murderer Hans Beckert, played by Peter Lorre, claims he cannot constrain himself no matter how hard he tries. The criminals, knowing that Beckert will ultimately be released from some prison hospital and that he will kill again, think that the only solution is to kill him on the spot. However, his "lawyer", provided by the criminals in order to imitate a fair trial and the due process of law, accuses them for hypocrisy (the criminal boss presiding the trial is himself wanted for three murders), and claims that the fact Beckert cannot help himself is the precise reason why he must not be killed. He is not responsible for his deeds, so he should not be punished. The final scene stops before the sentence on the regular trial by the state is pronounced. Instead of the judge's sentence, the message is directed to the viewers: all of us should take better care of our children.

In Lang's film we can see all the intricacies of interpretation. They open in front of us in both dimensions, of social diagnostics and political prescriptions. On the one side – let us label this position Left – we could speak of a hypocritical society seeking scapegoats for its own fallacies. The killer is but one of the lost and alienated children, perhaps a patient to be cured. On the other side – we can call it Right – the killer is naturally evil. He cannot help it but to kill young girls: it is in his nature. Whether he is morally guilty or not is beside the point: just retribution and protection of society demand punishment, and the cheapest solution in utilitarian terms is simply to take his life, while treatment is costly, dubious in terms of success, and with a high chance of recidivism.

We do not need to resolve the paradoxes of *M* here. For now, the Lang example serves us to suggest that truth in these matters is – if it is at all "out there" – hard to find, and that evil and policies to counter it are a slippery terrain for political theory. When one builds a political theory of preventive morality, one should take this into account and develop a clear theoretical picture of evil's functioning in order to form a theoretical basis for policies to tackle it, within the framework of adequate political morality. The idea of this text is to provide some conjectures useful for building a clearer picture of how evil works in a specific area of human activity to which the term is perhaps most legitimately applied. Probing Edyvane's theory through a different lens on the functioning of evil will pose some interesting questions to his theory and provide at least some provisory and sketchy suggestions on how to answer these questions. The specific way I am going to do it, foreshadowed in the title and in the Fritz Lang example ("method"), and the specific area of "evil" I am going to focus on ("subject matter"), require a double warrant. This warrant will conclude the introductory

section, defining the terrain for concrete analyses in the second part of the essay.

In the analysis, I am going to use different examples from literature and film that give causal explanations of violence and sometimes offer political prescriptions to cope with it. Why research fiction and not the "truth"? Fiction speculates on the ontology of evil in many interesting and non-trivial ways. First, it is legitimate to expose Edyvane's theory to this kind of test since his own method is to use a wide array of creative ideas from fiction to build and enrich his political theory. In the introduction to the manuscript, Edyvane states that he will use "the insights from art and literature" and he does so, using various material: it can be some fine grained skeptical insight from Montaigne's *Essays*, the idea of hope from Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, or an interpretation of Goya's grotesque pilgrims from *A Pilgrimage to San Isidro*, an early 19th century painting. This justification can be extended further. In his presentation in Rijeka, Edyvane confessed that although his book is not a book on Stuart Hampshire, a figure of this late Oxford philosopher "looms large" in it. This is indeed so, and it offers an additional warrant for our method of inquiry. In the fourth chapter of the manuscript, Edyvane extensively discusses Hampshire's ideas from *Justice Is Conflict*, quoting him that "an understanding of human nature... is best achieved... through the study of human feelings as expressed in history, literature and personal experience", and stating (not surprising for a reader of Montaigne[8]) that such a study could "reveal

an array of diverse and often clashing virtues and moral aspirations" as well as "certain rough patterns and regularities" (Edyvane, 2012: IV, 17).

Hampshire's position is not just an additional *ad hominem* ornament to our warrant. It is interesting because it strongly suggests there is some inherent quality in art and literature for human understanding, which in turn suggests they are often too easily formally subsumed under the label of fictional accounts. No matter how exactly we decide to label them, it is out of the question that they bring us better understanding of different problems in social sciences and political theory. One could here evoke the old 19th century idea that human sciences in the widest sense (*Geisteswissenschaften*) cannot copy the methods of natural sciences. It is a theme that is classically explored in Gadamer's hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1978: 1-25).[9] Knowledge is perhaps obtained not through blind obedience to methodological canons, but has much more to do with "psychological subtleness" (cf. Grondin, 1999: 23 *et passim*). Without any doubt, art and literature are an important factor in building these faculties and acquiring insights.

Society and Montaigne, explored the political potentials of misanthropy.

[9] Gadamer claims that historical understanding precedes any discussion of usefulness or effectiveness of formal scientific methods, be it methods of natural sciences or hermeneutics in the sense of, for example, philological or theological hermeneutics, i.e. some kind of narrow scholarly art and craft of understanding (cf. Gadamer, 1978: 23). Nevertheless, that does in no way mean that methodical and precise work in human sciences is not important, even for Gadamer. On the contrary (cf. Grondin, 1999: 58).

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[8] Prior to the symposium in Rijeka, Edyvane held a lecture in Zagreb on 18th October. The lecture, entitled *Rejecting Society: Friendship,*

The other, more mundane way to put it is that good fiction usually builds on strong personal experience, perceptive talent, thorough research and preparatory work done by the author. It can thus present some real problems of society and politics, including the problems of evil deeds, relevant for political theory, and it can often do it better than some dry scientific compendium or methodologically correct but shallow or irrelevant research. Finally, when speaking about this matter, one must not forget the "magic" expressive element of fiction, one that is hard to explain rationally. Doris Lessing, the 2007 Nobel laureate in literature, writing the first tome of her autobiography, somewhat disappointedly concluded that her autobiography is perhaps inferior to her literary magnum opus *The Golden Notebook*. Her statement applies to the works we use here as material for detecting problems: "I have to conclude that fiction is better at 'the truth' than a factual record. Why this should be so is a very large subject and one I don't begin to understand" (Lessing, 2008a: ix).[10]

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[10] Aside of much else that it does, Lessing's Golden Notebook perhaps gives better insight into the "intellectual and moral climate" on the Left after the Second World War than many, if not all, historical investigations of the theme. The same goes for the reading of Stendhal's and Tolstoy's works, which give excellent insight in 19th century France and Russia: "To read Red and Black, and Lucien Leuwen is to know that France as if one were living there, to read Ana Karenina is to know that Russia" (Lessing, 2008b: xv). Even if this statement sounds naïve and overconfident (in the elementary Cartesian sense, one might ask: How do you know, without a clear methodological check? Why should we believe your claim?), I am prepared to take

Of course, the common sense and general methodological decency of science oblige us to provide a short caveat, concluding the discussion of our first warrant: the idea is not to glorify "fiction over truth", but to use fiction in an intelligent way to get us to the core of the problems. Interesting discursive reflections clad in nice aesthetics, built on personal experiences and ruminations of finer spirits, often show us the core of the problem, possible causes and consequences of the phenomenon, and give clues for political theory. This is simply the Popperian "it does not matter where it springs from" complex of discovery, not the complex of testing an idea that principally demands firmer methodological rules for falsification. In this phase, we are using creative insights to *ask questions* and provide *preliminary* answers and *suggestions* for theorizing and "further research". Without this caveat, it could be just fiction.

The second warrant explains why I chose to focus on the specific area of evildoing to illustrate the problems of the ontology of evil. I must admit that I cannot be sure if my discussion applies to other social evils or even if one can speak of a general ontology of evil. I don't want to make such ambitious claims, but I am certain that even the discussion in this narrow area will provide very useful insights to those who eventually wish to

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the risk of being unscientific, at least in this initial exploratory phase. As economist and political scientist Charles Lindblom rightly stated not so long ago, highlighting different ideological and methodological limitations of social sciences, the scope of probing in our "troubled attempt to understand and shape society" should not be too constrained, in order to avoid impairment in our thinking (Lindblom, 1990: 59-77).

explore a general ontology of evil. The reasons for this narrow focus stem from my particular research interests. I defended my PhD thesis on politics and violent crime in Croatia chronologically situated in the twenty years period beginning with Croatia's gaining of independence. This part of my research built a historical and comparative framework for understanding violent crime and political violence. The framework included a wide exploration of the theme of violence in literature and film.[11] I see part of that research to be relevant in discussing Edyvane's theory.

Without much hesitation, violent crime can be called evil. People beating and killing each other, sometimes for political reasons and within political structures – state or non-state, formal or informal – breach the old ideal of peaceful social contract and the state's monopoly of force under the rule of law. Violence challenges the elementary presuppositions for decent life in a society. When violence escalates, it all goes down to Hobbes again. Violence, or more specifically "violent crime", is an evil, then, although a specific one. Among innumerous examples of different fictional discursive depictions of this problem, its causes and solutions, together forming

an ontology of violent evil, I chose about half a dozen examples, showcasing some "patterns and regularities" which interest Hampshire and Edyvane. These are, I think, the paradigmatic cases relevant in discussion of Edyvane's theory, chosen from the field that is just short of immense.[12]

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[11] In the framework of research on penal policy and violent crime, this research theme can be justified with the help of Nils Christie, famous Norwegian criminologist and living institution of leftist discourse on penal policy. According to Christie, the image of man comes from different discursive sources (no doubt including literature and film): "Our criminal policies influence our images of man: how he is, how he ought to be. But our images of man – brought to us from other sources – do also set standards for criminal policies" (Christie, 1986: 105).

[12] The accounts of violent crime in literature range from fatal and apolitical pictures of the violent subject, given in Camus' *Stranger* or Genet's *Miracle of a Rose*, to Vian's surrealist and ironic provocations in *The Ants*; from Kafka's ideas on violence performed by a depersonalized bureaucracy in *The Process* and *The Castle* or by a punishing machine of his baroque story *In the Penal Colony*, to specifically political causes of violence and suffering in Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch* or Orwell's totalitarian dystopia *1984*; from the evils of society portrayed in Dickens' *Oliver Twist* or Hugo's *Les Misérables*, where crime and violence stem from poor living conditions of the working class, to the evils of nature in Bulgakov's *The Fatal Eggs* or Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. The same discursive and political diversity is caught in film, ranging from Gavras' and Haneke's films (e.g. *Z*, *Caché*, *Das weisse Band*) to films by Peckinpah, Boorman or Milius (*Straw Dogs*, *Conan*, *Zardoz* and *Deliverance*), Lars von Trier (*Dogville*, *The Antichrist*) or Kubrick (*The Clockwork Orange*). I discuss some of these in detail in the second part of the essay. Although that would be in spirit of Edyvane's research, I decided to exclude other forms of art because that would stretch our story too much, making the pool of material from which we would have to choose not only short of immense, but literally short of infinite: in tracing the ontology of evil in the field of violent crime and penal policy one could, for example, interpret Van Gogh's *La ronde des prisonniers* (*The Round of the Prisoners*) from 1890 (cf. Rivera Beiras, 2005: 167), similarly to the way Edyvane uses Goya; analyze comic books like the classic

The Ontology of Evil in Literature and Film: Society, Nature, Reform, and Repression

A. Society and Reform

We can build from simpler to more complex positions. Thus a good starting place for probing Edyvane's theory with different ontologies of evil is the naïve position on the Left. At least in literary criticism, this naiveté is admitted. Ironically, the genre that depicts society and its ills, "socialist realism", is not realist at all. Its function is political: its role is to take part in all-encompassing revolutionary struggle. The Wikipedian definition is formidably pregnant and precise here: "Socialist realism is a teleologically-oriented style having its purpose the furtherance of the goals of socialism and communism".[13] The novel *Mother* written by Maxim Gorky in the beginning of the 20th century is a good example of that "teleogical" discourse where a strong sense of political purpose pre--shapes the diagnosis. In the first chapter of the novel, Gorky draws a firm connection between hard and desperate lives of the working class on the turn of the century and their inclination to violence, which is in no way instrumental, but only serves as a relief for their pointless existence. The factory is used as a

picturesque metonym for the brutalities of capitalism and the social miseries of the working men:

> Every day the factory whistle bellowed forth its shrill, roaring, trembling noises into the smoke-begrimmed and greasy atmosphere of the work-ingmen's suburb; and obedient to the summons of the power of steam, people poured out of gray houses (...) The day was swallowed up by the factory; the machine sucked out of men's muscles as much vigor as it needed (Gorky, 1907, Ch. 1).

The causal chain in the first chapter consists of a few precise interconnected segments: "the accumulated exhaustion" deprives workers of their appetite; "exhausted with toil" they drink; they drink lots of vodka; they beat their wives and children, they fight among themselves, sometimes killing each other. This all affects the children, which are socialized into this pointless and violent existence:

> This lurking malice steadily increased, inveterate as the incurable weariness in their muscles. They were born with this disease of the soul inherited from their fathers. Like a black shadow it accompanied them to their graves, spurring on their lives of crime, hideous in its aimless cruelty and brutality (*ibid.*).

Unless political struggle changes things, constant and pointless drunkenness and violence appears as "perfectly legitimate": "Life had always been like that. It flowed on monotonously and slowly somewhere down the muddy, turbid stream, year after year..." (*ibid.*).

Our focus here is not political, so it is of less importance if we take the offered ontology of violence produced by injustices of capitalism as a literary de-

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The Eternaut, exploring the violent state of nature (Oesterheld and López, 2008); or analyze songs, spanning from Bob Dylan's politically engaged *Only a Pawn in their Game*, about the racist social structures and politics ultimately responsible for the shooting of a civil rights activist, to The Pogues' depressive and fatalistic *Hell's Ditch* that uses the allegory of the rose for a killer, making explicit references to Genet's book.

[13] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_realism

piction seeking revolution or as a caricature of the past, meaning that capitalism is a lesser evil that can be cured by workings of social democracy and its social policies, which long ago curbed the extreme versions of (19th century) capitalism. The ontology is the same in both variants and their political prescriptions: violence comes from society and can be best cured by inducing changes in society by the means of social policy, not by the narrow measures of criminal justice policy-making.

Accepting this ontology of evil opens some questions for Edyvane. If austerity is the virtue for governing the public life in liberal democracies – political theory in the Edyvanean framework must more or less take these for granted and exclude the possibility of revolutionary struggle – and if political ethics is to be preventive, can evil be cured or amended? In the fourth chapter of the manuscript, Edyvane writes of sovereign evil as something quite narrow. Sovereign evils are "perennial" evils, experienced as such immediately "by any normally responsive person". We can put aside the question of how much politics and different ideological inclinations make a concept of normal person useful in political theory – as we have mentioned in the introduction, a consensus could be very hard to reach on the sovereignty of evil – but nonetheless, this narrower conception would not allow for curing much of the evil in the framework of a "socialist" ontology of evil. Starvation is a sovereign evil, but the problem of Gorky's workers is poverty and unfair toil, which are not perceived as evil by "any normally responsive person". In this sense, narrowly conceived preventive ethics would not allow for much political action in amending evils.

On the other hand, there is a different aspect of austerity ethics presented in Edyvane's manuscript. If I understand him correctly, he speaks affirmatively of post Second World War (British) welfarism. This opens a possibility for a wider conception of sovereign evil: social policies, such as public health system and social insurance open to all citizens, and regulatory policies, such as statal control of the banks and the market system, could be subsumed under the wider umbrella of preventive ethics. But then it could turn out that there are two Edyvanes and that sovereign evil is a bit more specific, and consequently – not sovereign.

B. Nature and (Impossibility of) Reform

But should we accept this ontology that is so problematic for Edyvane? The question is whether evil, in its essential part, is produced by society or not? If unjust society really produces evil, than preventive ethics gives too little and comes too late. This perennial question is not to be conclusively answered here but, luckily for Edyvane, there is very probably much more to violent crime – perhaps a symptom and a symbol of evil – than provided by the discourse of Gorky's socialist realism and its lighter versions. Our second excerpt comes from roughly the same time, but the position of this author is opposite. Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* from the second half of the 19th century speaks of psychology or, more generally, nature as the root cause of evil. For us, the interesting moment in the novel is not the relatively banal deed, but the discourse surrounding it. The killing of an old evil usurer and her half-sister gets the plot going, but the discussions the killer, Raskolnikov, leads with the cunning police investiga-

tor, Porfiry Petrovitch, together with his friend, Razumikhin, is the literary place where the discourse on evil and causes of crime comes to prominence. Dostoyevsky's message is that socialism does not cure the problems of human nature responsible for evil deeds. Not the factory, a metonym for capitalism successfully producing evils, but the phalanstery, a metaphor for socialism unsuccessfully curing evils, is used in the following excerpt to pinpoint the problems of naïve socialist ideas on preventing evils:

> I am not wrong. I'll show you their pamphlets. Everything with them is "the influence of environment", and nothing else. Their favorite phrase! From which it follows that, if society is normally organized, all crime will cease at once, since there will be nothing to protest against and all men will become righteous in one instant. Human nature is not taken into account, it is excluded, it's not supposed to exist! They don't recognize that humanity, developing by a historical living process, will become at last a normal society, but they believe that a social system that has come out of some mathematical brain is going to organize all humanity at once and make it just and sinless in an instant, quicker than any living process! (...) And it comes in the end to their reducing everything to the building of walls and the planning of rooms and passages in a phalanstery! The phalanstery is ready, indeed, but your human nature is not ready for the phalanstery – it wants life (...) You can't skip over nature by logic (Dostoyevsky, 1866, Part III, Ch. 5).

The part is spoken in conversation by Razumikhin who "interrupted with heat" to explain how one cannot put

"the whole secret of life in two pages of print" (*ibid.*). The symbols in the names are clear, at least to the speakers of Slavic languages (such as Croatian): the troubled killer's name Raskolnikov connotes problems of psychology, nature and loss of control (*raskol* literary meaning *divide*), while Razumikhin's name is a strong positive signifier (*razum* means *reason*) and associates the quoted message with reasonableness and prudence. The final shocking example, serving to support the idea that nature is the cause of problems, also comes from Razumikhin, who asks how one can blame society when a forty year old man rapes a ten year old girl, a theme that is also explored in Dostoyevsky's later novel *Demons*,[14] and that brings us back to Lang's Beckert, where we started.

But if the problem is in nature, what can be done by politics? If for the first ontology Edyvane's position does not do enough, for this one it cannot do enough, if anything at all? Preventive ethics won't do much to stop Raskolnikov from killing the evil granny. If socialism does not cure evil, liberal democracy certainly does no better job. The Edyvanean liberal political theory is agnostical in the matters of human nature; it cannot interfere in the private sphere of the individual, who must first commit a violent crime for the state to react. Liberal preventive ethics starts from given natures of its subjects. Nature is the source of evil and moral advance, if one can speak of such a thing, is at best very slow and fickle. Consensus is reached, but liberal preventive ethics can only react to evil

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[14] Stavrogin, the central character in *Demons*, rapes a young girl who commits suicide. He also murders his disabled wife, finally committing suicide himself.

things which are out of its control. Within this framework, evil is the sovereign, but a poor one.

C. Society and Nature: A Double Reform?

But what if evil is the product *both* of bad society and bad nature? This is the position taken by Aldous Huxley in his utopian novel *The Island* from the early sixties. Defining the spirit of the decade, the novel portrays a utopian political community located on the island of Pala where subjects live a peaceful and happy life, enriched with different self-fulfilling experiences. Blessings of Western science and technology are combined with Eastern thinking and holistic spiritual doctrines. The economy is not industrial. The environment is preserved, while technology is applied in a controlled and limited manner. Huxley's eclectic New Age heaven brings a unique ritual of initiation to higher spheres of perception: Pala subjects develop their spirituality by taking *moksha*, a psychedelic drug fabricated from mushrooms.

The peaceful utopia cannot survive in a belligerent surrounding, and so the Palanese society ultimately falls victim to a military defeat. However, discussions between Will Farnaby, a shipwrecked journalist who enthusiastically explores the Palanese society, and Pala's inhabitants, especially Dr. Robert, grandson of Dr. Andrew MacPhail, a Scottish physician who co-founded Pala, reveal how Pala is, internally, almost literally devoid of violence. From violence in the family and violent crimes by petty criminals to war crimes orchestrated by ambitious political leaders, ontological ruminations from Huxley's Island portray violence as stemming from mankind's yearning for power and domination.

The problem for Huxley's Dr. Robert is that all small-scale and large-scale, political and non-political "tyrants and sadists" – all the frustrated "power-loving troublemakers" are not curbed and reformed early enough in their lives. Together with society, politics, morals and culture of the West, these violent actors produce a spiral chain of suffering. The evil is written both in the human nature and in the structure of society, which enables human nature to develop its destructive potentials to the fullest.

Since there are two fundamental types of violent subjects, "two distinct and dissimilar species – the Muscle People and the Peter Pans", two different strategies of violence prevention are employed in the ideal Palanese society. The Peter Pans, immature romantics who want to compensate their inferiority complex with excesses of power (Huxley's ultimate example is Hitler), are dealt with by the means of "early diagnosis and three pink capsules a day before meals". Jail sentences, psychoanalysis and psychiatry are no solution for Dr. Robert; neither are moralistic Christian sermons: "Words about sibling rivalry and hell and the personality of Jesus are no substitutes for biochemistry". The Muscle Men (the ultimate example is Stalin) are, however, "as muscular" and "just as tramplingly extraverted" on Pala. Their lust for power is controlled by Palanese societal and political arrangements; it is deflected "from people and on to things". While it would perhaps be a simplifying overstatement to say that a potential totalitarian dictator becomes a lumberjack, Huxley's utopian social reformers offer no doubt about the success of the Palanese social experiment: "A crop of potential failures and criminals, potential tyrants and sadists, potential mis-

anthropes and revolutionaries for revolution's sake, has been transformed into a crop of useful citizens who can be governed adandena asatthena – without punishment and without a sword". The following passage sums up Dr. Robert's lengthy discourse and gives the essential contours of Huxley's ontology of violent evil, focusing, interestingly enough in our context, on a classical liberal thinker who theorized on power:

> That was Acton's fatal weakness. As a political theorist he was altogether admirable. As a practical psychologist he was almost nonexistent. He seems to have thought that the power problem could be solved by good social arrangements, supplemented, of course, by sound morality and a spot of revealed religion. But the power problem has its roots in anatomy and biochemistry and temperament. Power has to be curbed on the legal and political levels; that's obvious. But it's also obvious that there must be prevention on the individual level. On the level of instinct and emotion, on the level of the glands and the viscera, the muscles and the blood (Huxley, 1962: 189).

The passage points to another limitation in prevention of evil we are faced with if we accept Edyvane's understanding of political theory. Huxley is warning us that the narrow liberal conception of political theory and sovereignty of evil will not produce an effective solution. We will return to this theme in the conclusion, employing our most pessimistic fictional forces, but here it is worth noting that liberal political theory, tailored to the existent liberal democracies and the fact of pluralism, could not be good enough for solving or at least ameliorating the problem of evil. In the utopian

framework of Huxley's Island, diminishing violence requires not only total reformation of society, politics and ideology, but determined imposition of behavioral patterns to subjects, perhaps even involuntary tinkering with biochemistry. While Dostoyevsky stops at diagnosing that the problem is in nature and that naïvely conceived socialist reforms do not work, Huxley is much more ambitious: he demands a *total* change of society and nature. That is deeply illiberal.

One could make a bit of a Foucauldian empirical remark that imposition of behavioral patterns and subtleties of pharmacotherapy is long going on in the West, but liberal political tradition offers a bit more maneuvering space for subjects. Even if the main points of Huxley's dual ontology are accepted, his solution for evil is too radical, or at least not liberal enough for the role of political theory Edyvane takes as his starting axiom. New age topping does not alter the fact that a totalitarian price is paid for Palanese annihilation of violence. To pay at least some respect to ontology that should be informing liberalism – free will of the autonomous subject – we must, perhaps paradoxically, turn to the right side of the ideological spectrum in our search for acceptable solutions.

D. Nature and Repression

The idea that human nature is evil, in the above mentioned Schmittian sense that human beings are dangerous and potentially violent, is commonplace in literature, alongside with the ideas that the social milieu produces violence.[15]

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[15] In his short story *Fog* from the late forties, Boris Vian parodies the stereotypic discourses of Left and Right on violent crime: "'This established, if we consider that from his

What Dostoyevsky hinted becomes much worse and explicit in discourses I will present here. The idea that nature is evil does not only appear among Christian authors who variate the theme of the Original Sin, but also outside of interpretive keys with references to a particular religious worldview.

A classical place in the first sense is William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, the allegorical novel from the fifties about a group of preadolescent boys who, after a plane crash, find themselves on a desolate island. From singing *kyrie eléison*[16] in a well-ordered society (or at least in a repressive enough education system), where grownups drink tea, discuss and solve problems (Golding, 1954: 101), the boys end up killing each other as their

nature takes over. Simon, the Christological figure, is killed, as well as Piggy, an overweight boy with glasses (and the sole one with the "abilities of abstract thinking"), in the story that intents to depict "the darkness of man's heart" (*ibid.*: 225).

On the other hand, a similar view of nature can appear within skeptical and ironic frameworks, with clearly secular overtones.[17] *The Fatal Eggs*, a short story from the twenties written by Mikhail Bulgakov, is a good example. In the interpretively rich story, chaos is spawned in the society by the work of nature. In the biological laboratory experimenting with amphibians, a red ray of light is accidentally discovered by Professor Persikov. The ray makes amoebas, and then frogs reproduce at an enormous speed and devour each other. In the process, the most unscrupulous, most destructive, or simply most "evil", prevail.[18]

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youth my client only knew robbers and assassins, that all his life he had before him an example of debauchery and decadence, that he gave himself to this life-style and adopted it as normal to the extent that he became a debauchee, robber and assassin himself, what can we conclude?' The jury was confounded by such eloquence, and an old bearded man on the extreme right with wise diligence watched for an involuntary splutter from the floor. But once more the teacher was obliged to answer: 'Nothing', and blushed. (...) 'We will conclude that submersed in an honorable milieu, my client only would have contracted honorable traits. (...)' (...) 'But', concluded the lawyer, 'what I told you just now wasn't true. My client is of a reputable family, has received an excellent education, and killed the victim voluntarily and in full conscience so that he could steal his cigarettes.' 'You are right!' the jury shouted unanimously. After deliberation, the murderer was condemned to death" (Vian, 1992: 81-82).

[16] This liturgical theme appears in the first of two adaptations to film, the black and white version from the 1960s. Golding's story belongs to the film section as well.

[17] The position of the author outside of the analyzed work, or even outside its smaller discursive excerpt, is of no importance here. For example, Camus may be on "the Left" and write essays against the death penalty (Camus and Koestler, 2002), but his *Stranger* is in that sense fatalistic and apolitical; violence happens not because of society or a malignant subject, but in a twist of fate in the wider framework of various absurdities of existence, perhaps "because of" the sea (*mer*) and the strong sun (*soleil*) that come together in the main character's name.

[18] Bulgakov's description of struggle between the amoebas has a general air: "In the red zone and in the whole plate there was less and less room and the inevitable struggle began. The newborn attacked, tore to pieces and devoured one other. Among the newborn lied the corpses of those that died in the struggle for survival. The best and the strongest prevailed. And these were horrid (...) they dis-

When politics in the early Soviet Union gets interested in the political and social potential of the ray, the ray is accidentally used on reptile eggs. The invasion of evil reptile mutants almost destroys society. They are not defeated by the civil guard and the armed forces but, not surprisingly, by the infamous Russian winter, a force of nature itself, which turned out to be historically important in curbing various imperial projects. Instead of the depth of moral fall, Bulgakov's story presents a cynical view of evolution, where its essential impulses of reproduction and aggression working in humans are amplified and shown through a layered metaphor.

Evil and destruction come naturally. Within these discourses, evil is often fatalistically portrayed, endowed with a demonic persistence and aesthetic qualities. Beneath the aesthetics, the ontological difference in comparison to the position from the earlier sections of this essay is that evil essentially comes from humans. The arrangement of society is irrelevant: evil always manifests itself, regardless of the type of society. The second part of the difference, that constitutes the position on the Right, skeptical to any form of belief in social progress and social utopianism, is that human evil needs fear, sanctions and repression to be controlled. In another words, it needs strong authority. The vehement version of this discourse can be found in Michel Houellebecq's writings. His *Elementary Particles* from the late 1990s combine evil nature and need for repression. Adolescent boys are explicitly equated with animals in the pack. The stronger domi-

nate the weaker; they brutally beat and sexually harass and humiliate them. In boarding schools things get worse when, in the naïve spirit of the 1960s, the regime of "self-discipline" is introduced. The leftist solution that diminishes authority makes things worse:

> One or two cruel elements were enough to reduce the others to a state of savagery. In early adolescence, boys can be particularly savage; they gang up and are only too eager to torture and humiliate the weak. Cohen had no illusions about the depths to which the human animal could sink when not constrained by law. (...) Unfortunately, a ministerial directive taken after the riots of 1968 introduced an autodisciplinary system in boarding schools and a reduction in staffing. The decision was very much of its time, and resulted in considerable savings in salaries. It became easier for pupils to move about at night, and soon the bullies took to staging raids on the younger boys' dormitories at least once a week. They would bring one or two victims back to the *cinquième* dormitory, where the ceremonies would begin. (...) For the most part, animal societies are structured according to a hierarchy in which rank relates directly to the physical strength of each member. The most dominant male in the group is known as the *alpha male,* his nearest rival the *beta male,* and so on down to the weakest of the group, the *omega male* (Houellebecq, Part I, Ch. 8, "The Omega Male").

Reduction of staff in the wider array of state apparatuses could perhaps be understood as a neoliberal measure, more to the Right than to the Left on the ideological spectrum, but the essential

tinguished themselves by special wickedness and swiftness" (Bulgakov, 2000: 19; translated from Croatian by K. P.).

idea is that weakening of the authority and its replacement with different social programs is a bad thing to do, one that underestimates "evil" in human nature.[19] This position is perhaps too much on the Right for Edyvane. Even skeptical misanthropy, building political theory on the sovereignty of evil, appeals to some decency in political subjects and ascribes to them the ability to hope. On the other hand, paradoxically, the idea that evil is natural could be reconciled with Edyvane's framework. The view that human nature is evil is combined with the complementary view that aggressive subjects are also driven by a perhaps more fundamental drive for self-preservation. Since anybody can kill anybody, and the final consequence of that spiral of violence is the state of civil war, where all stand against all, than this evil can perhaps become a sovereign, driving the minimal political consensus required by Edyvane. It all returns to Hobbes and the authority of Leviathan, to the backbone of liberalism.[20]

E. An Excurse into Film before Concluding: German Fables vs. Old Testament Justice

The world of cinema offers interesting variations of the portrayed discourses on violence and roots of evil, which open further interesting questions to Edyvane. A different discursive medium, with its altered angles and shifted accents, offers possibilities to continue our probing. Perhaps the strongest leftist cinematic statement on specifically *political* violence to this day is Costa Gavras' *Z* from the end of the 1960s. The film tells a universal story – with strong and intended references to the events preceding the then actual authoritarian rule of the military junta in Greece – about a charismatic left-wing politician leading a peace movement. In the beginning of the film, the politician is killed in riots. As the story about the investigation of the case develops, seemingly spontaneous violence of the right-wing extremists is exposed as carefully planned. The executors are in fact political agents in-

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[19] The other possible interpretive accent, stemming from Houellebecq, is that this natural evil is amplified in specific institutional settings such as nursing homes, boarding schools and borstals. These places do not lack horror stories on violence. This is classically explored in Musil's *The Confusions of Young Törless* (2004). Musil, who as a boy attended a military internate in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, is of course more sublime and expressionist in style, but he also vividly portrays violence, which has a strong sadistic and sexual dimension to it.

[20] There is a normative twist to this negative view of human nature. Nietzsche affirmed its will to power: hate toward nature comes from the weak, those who are sick from nature, i.e. who are sick from reality, and seek to overthrow it with the ethics of the weak

(Nietzsche, 1999: 8, 23-24). And Nietzsche's iconoclasm is pale when compared to de Sade's almost a century older discourse that vividly describes brutalities of human nature, combining philosophical reflexions with precise pornographic dissections of orgiastic violence. For de Sade, the human being is part of nature, which is but an eternal series of violent crimes that the strong perform over the weak (de Sade, 2004: 75, 161). In one sense, however, that discourse is not revolutionary but conservative: perverse enjoyments by definition need a normal moral and political order to fulfill themselves as transgressions. (For the political usage of de Sade as a vehicle of critique of Hobbesian social contract theory, and the introduction of the concept of "political state of nature", cf. Cvijanović, 2007.)

strumentalized by the government and high-ranking military officials who understand socialism as "mildew" destroying the unity of the national body.

Gavras' position could be subsumed under the umbrella of ontology of the Left, with a strong critique of nationalism. In the story, lumpenproletariat and madmen act as direct agents of evil. On the basis of unofficial political legitimation, military and police training, and mandate from the government, they execute violence, ultimately helping to procreate the inequalities of power in an unjust order that could otherwise be changed. According to the ontology of the Left, social change would reduce the causes of violence, but the movie shows that it does not happen. The question stemming from its portrayal of events places challenges to Edyvane on the empirical terrain. *Z* conveys a universal message, but its strong social and historical rootedness – the film is arguably a literal description of events in Greece from the early 1960s, namely the assassination of Grigoris Lambrakis – tells a message of its own. It is hard to cure evil if concrete societies are divided. Perhaps social change would cut down evil, but what is the use if there is no real chance for consensus even on sovereign evils, since ideological, political, religious, and cultural divides in existing societies are remarkably deep and entrenched. In Gavras' perspective, societal evil is perhaps essentially different than natural evil. It is much worse. But what can be done if "socialism" is "mildew" for the strong political forces not only in then and today's Spain, Greece, and perhaps Croatia, with the "red" and "black" historical and ideological divide entrenched in family histories, but in the West in general. Political theory that seeks to cure evil and

starts from the consensus building potential of contemporary societies taken as they are, could face hard challenges. Viewed in that perspective, what are the real chances of evil to become our sovereign?

As *Z* shows us, the world of film sometimes offers rich and highly stimulating insight into the empirical terrain, but perhaps more often, it offers clear-cut ontological exercises that speculatively probe into the nature of violent evil. I will limit this section to three examples. The first sees evil as a consequence of oppressive authority structures. The second sees evil as the only way to fight evil. The final one simply sees people as evil, regardless of the society. The themes are familiar, but the accents are different, and they offer new challenges and intriguing questions for Edyvane.[21]

The action of Michael Haneke's recent film, *The White Ribbon*, takes place in a small German protestant village where various and inexplicable acts of

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[21] One should also check Boorman's films, showing violence in the state of nature (*Deliverance*) and explicitly connecting violence with sexuality (*Zardoz*). On the other side of the ideological spectrum, one should explore the subgenre of German cinema of the 2000s that speaks of different social experiments producing violence: *The Experiment*, where a division of roles between guards and prisoners (although in combination with certain problematic characters) brings an escalation of violence, and *The Wave*, where the division of roles between the leader and the party members in an experimental class on "autocracy" transforms playful teenagers into a hyper-disciplined and fanatic protototalitarian community whose members (again principally the ones having character problems) are ready to kill "traitors" and "enemies".

violence take place. The trap is set for the doctor: a stretched wire makes him fall from his horse and, consequently, he is badly injured. The pastor's budgerigar is impaled, and the baron's son is kidnapped and badly beaten. It is suggested that children are responsible for the evil deeds, but not as authentic small villains like in Golding or Houellebecq. Their violence functions as a symptom. In other words, Haneke's point could be that children react to the violence of authority structures. The pastor constantly sermonizes on guilt and punishes the children harshly for even the smallest offences.[22] On the other hand, the doctor is an expert in sexual violence. He rapes his daughter and abuses his maid, who was his mistress already at the time when his late wife was alive. The baron, the economic ruler of the village, treats his workforce badly. They are at constant risk of arbitrary firing. The message is that violence comes from "hidden" violence of societal structures: religion, family and economy. Since repression produces violence, it is a bad recipe for curbing violence. Similarly to Haneke's *Caché*, where this relationship is directly signified in the title, violence on the personal level appears only as a reaction to prior hidden violence.[23] Since it ends

with the beginning of the First World War, Haneke's story also serves as a political metaphor. The oppressed authoritarian generation is the one that later provided the popular terrain for political legitimation of National Socialism, and finally for the horrors of the Second World War, arguably the ultimate evil in the history of mankind, even if one measures evil solely by a simple quantitative criterion such as the number of deaths.

Haneke's question for Edyvane is where do austerity in the public sector and new civic ethics bring us? This ontology is much richer than the initial Gorky's story on limited socioeconomic roots of violence. Does minimal consensus on the sovereignty of evil leave all the evils coming from deeply entrenched structures of Western societies intact? Does political morality in the liberal framework offer too little and come too late? We will return to this in the conclusion.

The opposite ontology is displayed in Sam Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs* from the early 1970s, another film on violence. The role of David, a talented mathematician, is played by Dustin Hoffman. His habitus is one of an inhibited stereotypic "nerd" with big glasses. He symbolizes politeness and civilization. He arrives in a village in Cornwall with his wife, to work on his mathematical equations in the peace of her small and picturesque birthplace. The local bullies soon perceive his weakness, and violent evil arises. First his cat is killed, then his wife is raped. As he defends the vil-

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[22] The title of the movie refers to the symbolically ambivalent and interpretively challenging fact that the pastor puts white ribbons on children's arms as a sign of their purity, that should remind them not to commit any more sins.

[23] In *Caché* (Hidden), the bourgeois couple living in Paris starts receiving anonymous disturbing tapes, apparently for no reason. It turns out that the husband's moral misdeeds from early childhood are probably to blame: a jealous child's manipulation put an Arab boy, whose parents died in the 1961 Paris

massacre, into an orphanage instead of possible adoption. The film is an allegory for the French colonial guilty consciousness and political violence towards Arabs.

lage idiot from the drunken mob, a final massacre ensues in which David is victorious. Pushed to the edge, his violent nature emerges and he defends himself, his house and his family. One of the possible interpretive points is that violence can only be constrained by counter-violence, not by talk, deliberation or nice manners. Violence, a natural force, understands only the language of violence. If this animalistic ontology[24] is combined with liberal politics, the outcome is bleak.

The question is how far does the sovereignty of evil allow evil to be used to fight and constrain evil? The preceding decade provided a controversial example: the US foreign policy and military operations throughout the world have been following Peckinpah's elementary precept, literally dressed in a discourse of evil (Petković, 2005). Even the recent "State of the Union" addresses employ the imagery of danger and darkness, of "evil out there", and use military actions as political metaphors for American unity.[25] Our theme here is not the US foreign policy, which could perhaps better be subsumed under Haneke's chief trope of repression producing "evil" (which is then personalized and punished to clear one's guilty conscience), but Edyvane's liberal political theory. The question to him is: does the sovereignty of evil mean that political structures may and should fight fire with fire? The answer could be that the liberal framework allows for conditioned repression as a necessary deterrent. N.B. that one possible Peckinpah's point is also that if David had been firmer and more resolved, than the apotheosis of violence wouldn't have taken place: firm and clear, "austere" rules may sometimes be effective and prevent an escalation of evil.

That brings us to the last discursive example in this section, where Peckinpah's violent animals are endowed with free will and consciousness. Since they are turned into morally and politically autonomous subjects, the dire penal consequences are justified. In Lars von Trier's early 2000s *Dogville*, evildoers are more than just dogs. The simple scenery of the film, as if it were a theatre play, strengthens the bare-boned ontological message of the plot that tells a story about the roots of evil. Grace (played by Nicole Kidman) escapes from gangsters into a small American town, where she is accepted as part of the community.[26] She starts doing good deeds in order to be accepted by the town council as a permanent resident. Life looks happy until Grace is sought by the police twice. The town folk feel endangered and Grace is requested to do more work for the residents to redeem herself. She soon turns into a victim of oppression. Grace is exploited, sexually abused and raped. Finally, she becomes a slave in chains. The seemingly caring town intellectual Tom

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[24] The titular phrase is taken from the fundamental Taoist document *Tao Te Ching* (The Book of Path and Virtue) attributed to Laozi. In the 5th song of the book, it is said that the universe does not care for "straw dogs" (which were symbolically burned and stepped over during the public feasts in imperial China): *Heaven and earth do not act from any wish to be benevolent; they deal with all things as the dogs of grass are dealt with* (Laozi, 6th Ct B.C.).

[25] Barack Obama, *2012 State of the Union Address: Enhanced Version*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zgfi7wnGZlE

[26] Although the film is a part of Von Trier's "American Trilogy", the message is universal, like in the case of Gavras' *Z*.

makes a sentimental advance to her and is rejected. This hypocritical coward then becomes the leader of the evil flock of torturers and exploiters, "nobly" opting for her detention instead of rape. When gangsters finally arrive, it turns out that the mob leader is Grace's father. Gangsters kill all the residents in what seems to be a just retribution. The town is burned and Grace kills Tom herself.

One of the possible readings is the following: a simple, almost vulgar Christian symbolism is at work, as in Golding's story. "Grace" is here to give a chance, an escape from the Lord Father, who wisely knows that people have to be constrained by repression and harsh laws; that they have to fear violence so as not to inflict it upon one another. The more Grace gives to people, the more she is abused, until she finally learns the true human nature. Since they show no remorse after all they have done, she accepts her father's vengeance in the well--known Old Testament style. The city is burned like Sodom and Gomorrah, and the only being that survives is the town dog – "Moses". Alongside this Biblical layer, there is also an ontology of evil at work. In a text on Von Trier's *Dogville*, Andrea Brighenti accordingly remarks:

> The presence of Grace turns out to be a significant and even abundant economic resource – sexual resources included. The ragged, ignorant inhabitants of Dogville transform themselves into slaveholders. Paradoxically, then, it is not because they are poor that they begin to do bad deeds – as the philanthropist argues – but because they are no longer as poor as they used to be (Brighenti, 2006: 106).

Unlike in Gorky and Haneke, evil does not come from society, and it can even thrive in an affluent society. Ontologically postulated freedom implies moral and penal responsibility for violent evildoers. Viewed in that perspective, the social state paternalism and belief in curing evils through economic and social progress turn out to be misguided and arrogant.[27] The Old Testament view of human nature brings Old Testament justice.[28] If we accept this ontology, the question is whether preventive ethics in its social impulses for amelioration would produce greater evil? Of course, in its narrower sense, it can accommodate a deterrent view which uses the threat of evil to prevent greater evil, as both films on the Right, Peckinpah's as well as Von Trier's, seem to imply.

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[27] In Von Trier's controversial *Manderlay*, also a part of his American trilogy, a negative picture of human nature is paired with skepticism towards democracy that ultimately produces more chaos than the authoritarian regime of governing, since it allows evil natures, now endowed with political rights and decision-making opportunities, to fully manifest themselves.

[28] Von Trier has a negative view of nature. In *Antichrist*, a phantasmagorical fox speaks nature's motto, congested into words: "Chaos reigns!" In an interview for Croatian newspapers, Von Trier explicitly spoke about such an understanding of nature: "When you look at how nature works, how life is procreated in nature, how there is lots of killing and suffering, I find it hard to accept that God created such a world. All that killing and suffering is such a bad idea" (*Nacional*, 26th January 2010, translated from Croatian by K. P.). Lars Von Trier became a Catholic when he turned 30. For a quasi-theological interpretation of *Antichrist* as a film that depicts an alternative world created by Satan, cf. Ebert, 2009.

Conclusion: Will Preventive Morality Extract Us from the Gutter?

The time is ripe to sum up how Edyvane's theory looks after our consecutive probing into the ontology of evil offered by the fictional discourses in literature and film, both on the Left and on the Right.

Against the ontology of the Left, it should survive, at least in its wider conception of curing evils in society producing violence (Gorky's working class), while in the narrower sense it could not do enough, especially if the problem is in faceted repression, not only economical but multi-structural, involving not only economy, but religion, family and gender roles (the more ambitious Haneke's story). Within this ontological framework, preventive civic ethics could give too little and arrive too late. A narrow consensus on sovereign evil could lead to reproduction of old sovereign evils. Haneke's *White Ribbon* discretely presages Nazism. Ultimately, he tells us, these structures of repression can lead to Arendtian total "moral collapse". It is the evil Edyvane notices and – because of particularly vile characteristics of the project – clearly classifies as sovereign evil (Edyvane, 2012: Outline, 5).

Against nature, as something that eschews not only phalanstery (Dostoyevsky), but finally all socializing and civilizing projects, no politics fares well. By virtue of its definition, within this ontological framework of evil, nature is simply outside of politics' reach. Since the sovereignty of evil cannot practically stop all evils, extreme de Sadean natures will always perform evil acts outside of society's and politics' reach, which can only react to evil's consequences. But the ontology which says that nature is evil

and that it can generally be amended with a bit of a civilizing repression,[29] or even fear of evil, could be accommodated within the framework of Edyvane's ideas. Golding's boys are not left alone to their dark hearts, and neither are their modern counterparts in Houellebecq's prose, or Peckinpah's straw dogs: liberalism offers minimal civilizing potentials and protection of "life, liberty and property" within the framework of austerity and minimal consensus. The backbone of Hobbesian liberalism is firm. However, its limits are in the moral autonomy of the subject. Sanctions in the Old Testament style are perhaps harsh, but autonomy and freedom legitimate using at least some form of evil to respond to prior evil. Liberalism must risk evil to be done, since it gives its subjects an option to choose. This is a point that can be drawn from Von Trier.

There is another point in liberalism having a limited reach in order to preserve the liberty of its subjects. Radical social engineering in the Huxleyan sense would possibly eradicate evil, but it would also eradicate politics. Pala may be a non-violent project, achieving a perfect society of happy and conscious expanding subjects, but it does so at a

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[29] It is quite another story when "natural" violence is intermingled with a primitive local culture of violence. This is explored in *Wake in Fright*, a film by Ted Kotcheff from the early seventies, also known as *Outback* (Kotcheff also directed *First Blood*, a film that fell prey to the Rambo franchise). In that film, the central character is a teacher who gets stuck in Australian outback where people drink gallons of bear, play primitive gambling games, take part in drunken brawls and in just as drunken kangaroo hunts, shooting animals just for fun from their pick-up trucks.

totalitarian price. No matter how justifiable from the utilitarian perspective it may appear, it is not only deeply illiberal to give pills to young Adolph, it would kill all politics as well. I guess Hannah Arendt would be opposed to that. Contemporary Britain isn't Pala; the West isn't either, and for liberal political theorists, it does not need to become Pala.

What does that leave us with? It depends on the ontology of evil and the precise way we decide to interpret Edyvane's theory. If we accept the ontology "of the Right" (nature and civilizing value of repression) and we say that austerity is socially ambitious enough, then evil will continue to thrive; it will not be prevented by minimal political consensus in contemporary societies. If it is the ontology "of the Left" we accept (society and its reform), then Edyvane's civic ethics might not do much, since society will continue to produce evils, especially if we accept Haneke's more demanding view of multiple repressive structures that produce evil. To put it short: is it Houellebecq or Haneke, and how much and what kind of political intervention in society does Edyvane's position allow? Empirically speaking, of course, the difficulties in achieving consensus remain. If we are faced with a deep ideological divide and authoritarian structures that, together with capitalism, produce class differences, like in Gavras' *Z*, that could be too much for any civic ethics provided by political theory. Edyvane accepts that society is "deeply divided" (Edyvane, 2012: Outline, 2). But *Z* tells us it could be too divided. Since members of society are "playing wholly different games", even a "rough consensus" could be a hard thing to achieve (*ibid.*: Outline, IV, 6).

Whatever ontology of evil we accept, which is finally an empirical question of *truth* about evil in the world (and not of fictional discourses that vividly portray it), I hope that this essay succeeded in showing that discussion on the ontology of evil is important. In building a political theory of evil, one must take into account how evil works. In order to effectively cure the consequences, one might have to cure the causes that lead to evil. It is important to understand evil in order to battle it. Edyvane writes that "treating evil as a political category involves focusing less on the issue of its agency and more on its harmfulness – less on its causes and more on its effects" (*ibid.*: Outline, 4), but that might leave us with impoverished political agnosticism. We have to know what we are dealing with in order to politically act against it. But do political liberalism and Edyvane's understanding of political theory in that context offer a solution for the political crisis Edyvane rightly diagnoses?

Society and Nature: A Double Disaster?

I intentionally left the hardest test for the end. There is yet another film – cold, misanthropical and pessimistic – that builds on literature and thus brings our two explored mediums, literature and film, together. Kubrick's *Clockwork Orange*[30] from the beginning of the 1970s is a dystopia that functions in the present

[30] There is some controversy surrounding different versions of Burgess' novel. The early American version of the book excluded the final "metanoia" chapter where the main character sees the errors of his ways. Kubrick filmed the pessimistic, shorter version, which is the natural one to employ in the theoretical discussion on politics – a pessimistic activity that usually does not rely on spontaneous moral volte-face.

time as a deeply pessimistic picture of contemporary liberal-democratic societies. It is also a careful fictional exercise in the analysis of ontology of violent evil. The plot is worth a short recounting.

The main character Alex is the evil leader of a gang of wanton youth, not deprived in any obvious way. The dystopian society is affluent and young evil-doers come from affluent families. They have the opportunity to school themselves; they have free time and all the possibilities for non-violent self-fulfillment. However, they beat, kill and rape their fellow citizens. Betrayed by his gang co-members ("droogs"), Alex gets 14 years in state prison for murder. His punishment brings no moral advance. When the Bible is read in prison, the prisoners burp, thus reminding the viewer of Huxley's observations on the impotence of moral education and Western penal policies. Alex is then exposed to the Ludovico technique, an experimental behavioral treatment creating a conditional reflex that makes the subject physically sick when his first violent impulse awakens. When the effectiveness of the procedure is demonstrated, the minister of the interior is proud. The priest (the one who ineffectively reads the Bible in prison) objects to the technique on the grounds that it eliminates free will, somewhat similarly to the ideas presented in Von Trier's *Dogville* – or to the ideas of C. S. Lewis, Christian apologist and author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, who in his own time published a paper on penal policy in "an obscure Australian journal" (Tonry, 2011: 19). He opted for (if necessary strict, but) transparent punishment, based on moral guilt and criminal responsibility of the criminal, and against disciplinary reformation of the subject, which Lewis saw

as the penal ideal that punishes the innocent, eliminates freedom of choice as well as the traditional possibility of mercy, and ultimately rests on some dubious "pattern of 'normality' hatched in a Viennese laboratory" (Lewis, 2011: 93).[31] The official response to the priest (and to Lewis) is that the government and the people are not interested in "subtleties of higher ethics", but that they simply want to solve the problem of crime effectively, cut it down and reduce the prison population.

The Ludovico treatment is deeply illiberal – and effective, like Huxley's Palanese procedures. After the treatment, Alex finds it impossible to be violent and as such he becomes the victim of those who had feared him and suffered violence from his hands. Since during the treatment Alex unfortunately listened

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[31] Cf. early plaidoyer for scientification of penal policy, i.e. "the systematic assistance of psychiatrists, psychologists, and social investigators", in: Glueck, 2011: 78. In the world of film, the theme of disciplinary oppression in institutions with nominal purpose to cure and reform the subjects is classically explored in Miloš Forman's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, from mid 1970s. Mostly harmless patients, subject to different psychiatric diagnoses and psychoactive medicines that make them numb are terrorized by evil nurse Ratched and other staff. In the depressing ending, subject who leads the tactical subversions within the institution and undermines disciplining authorities is lobotomized and thus turned into a human vegetable. The film is more of study in disciplinary power in Foucauldian sense (Foucault, 1975; 1980; 1997; Petković, 2010), with subjectless, a-liberal ontology of power struggles, which uses totally different theoretical language than Edyvane and is placed outside of humanistic tradition that more or less informs elementary ontology of liberalism.

to the grandiose music of Ludwig Van Beethoven, the composer he adores, he also developed a behavioral aversion to it. Alex is then used as a political weapon by the opposition, accusing the government of totalitarianism. By the means of Beethoven's music, he is forced to jump through a window and then portrayed in the press as a victim of the government's oppression. The minister of the interior gives him the reverse treatment that removes the aversion to violence and well-paid sinecure in exchange for silence about his case and for not pressing charges. Alex's evil grimace returns. He is filled with joy, and in the end he claims that he "was cured, all right".

The film offers anthropological, societal and political pessimism in portraying contours of evil in contemporary societies. Man is evil and does evil when opportunity arises: Alex was violent, but all of his former victims are also violent when they encounter him. The homeless guy, whom Alex and his droogs beat up, attacks Alex when he recognizes him and sees that he is helpless. Alex's former droogs now work in the police: they also beat and torture him to pay him back for the beating and domination when he was the leader of the group; his former bourgeois victims torture him and use him for political means. There is no remorse and no forgiveness in *Clockwork Orange*, and society and politics do not help. Alex's family is alienated, his parents are afraid of him,[32] social workers and probation officers are impotent when it comes to leading him to the right track. Classical penal policy can-

not reform Alex, while the new scientific one, aside of being illiberal, makes mistakes. In *Clockwork Orange*, even science is not to be trusted. Cynical liberal democratic politics is not interested in following a rational policy course, but only in remaining in power, while sensationalist media seeking scandals go back and forth from amplifying the problem of violence and praising the program to grizzly stories on abuse of human rights and totalitarian intrusions of the government. On the top stands the culture of blasé bourgeois society, the one that should provide a societal basis for parliamentary liberal democratic politics: the homes of the rich are burdened with decadence of clothing, strange habituses of their owners, phallic statues and kitschy interior design. The society and politics are disastrous, and that does not help the burden of human nature.

The final hard question for Edyvane is the following: if evil is a cumulative product of our societies' different institutions and human nature, what can be done by dysfunctional liberal democratic politics and political theory that tries to govern it with ideas for civil virtue? If things are that bad, then one can (if one does not want to summon the cultural pessimism of Mel Gibson's *Apocalypto*) recall Leo Strauss' (in)famous remark that modern political science fiddles while Rome burns, but is excused, since it does not know that Rome burns and it does not know that it fiddles. In other words, is political theory, constrained in the narrow empirical and normative framework of the given situation, a political theory in a straightjacket? Are we fiddling together with Edyvane if we make evil our sovereign concept, with the weak comfort that political theory, unlike the implicitly conservative poli-

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[32] One might argue that Alex's nature is a product of his dysfunctional family, which is in turn a product of the alienated industrial society.

tical science that ideologically produces existing ("burning") structures wishing to scientifically explain them, is at least more or less aware that it is fiddling, since it perceives the crisis and understands "evil" is the problem?

In the area of human violence and violent crime I chose to highlight in this essay, some authors claim that the conservative approach, with the lack of societal vision and constructive political programs, has produced only further decadence of society. Instead of aspirational solutions that could lead to development and social progress – this is the type of political morality Edyvane puts aside – one looks for the problems of the existing social order:

> Lacking a 'vision thing' with which to imagine the future and direct society the imagination of the political elite (indeed of western culture more generally) has withered and where there was previously a sense of possibilities and improvement, today's energy is put into attempts at damage limitation and harm reduction. Within this more limited mindset the tendency is to shift one's eyes from the horizon and onto the 'gutter' to discover ad nauseam the dangers that lurk there (Waiton, 2009: 372).

In the literature on criminal justice policy-making, this approach is also known as "governing through crime" (Simon, 2007), where, instead of building a better society, many of its essential supporting institutions are criminalized, i.e. governed with fear of crime and regulated with criminal law (for example, schools and families). The consequence of this kind of policy-making which alters society is that society falls more and more into the "gutter". The skeptical question could then be: do we want to fiddle – govern ourselves through evil – as "decadent" liberalism does? Luckily, there is also a skeptical answer to this question, with which I will conclude.

This modest fiddling has been going on for a long time. It has proven itself to be more robust and more successful than other more grandiose political orchestras that, instead of utopian music, produced the great sovereign evils of history. Searching for the minimal consensus on sovereign evil could be political liberalism at its best.[33] Playing with metaphors, Rome could burn for a long time. Perhaps the fire will die out one day, leaving some buildings intact for us to live together and possibilities to build new ones. If that happens, it would be a big praise for Edyvane's effort.

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[33] An alternate take could speak of "liberalism with a skeptical face" that, similarly to democracy in Churchill's famous adage, turns to be the least bad solution, and politically survives after all the "epistemological" and political challenges (Kurelić, 2002).

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Politička etika prevencije i ontologija zla: nekoliko pouka iz književnosti i filma

SAŽETAK U tekstu se polazi od različitih diskursa o zlu kako bi se ispitala politička teorija Dereka Edyvanea koji nastoji izgraditi preventivnu političku etiku koja počiva na konceptu "suverenosti zla". Rasprava se ograničava na specifično "zlo" – nasilje i nasilni zločin – a njegovi uzroci, posljedice i indicirana politika koja se s njim mora nositi, zahvaća se terminom "ontologija". Osnovna je ideja u tome da Edyvane mora preciznije odgovoriti na pitanje što zlo jest i kako ono funkcionira da bi ga postavio za suverena. Izbjegavanje posljedica zla i izgradnja političkog konsenzusa oko velikih zala pretpostavlja razumijevanje njihovih uzroka. Metoda istraživanja koja analizira fikciju legitimira se time što Edyvane sam u svojim istraživanjima analizira umjetnička djela i lijepu književnost ali, važnije od toga, time što klasični romani i filmovi nose oštar uvid u problematiku i sadržavaju kvalitete što ih čine korisnima u fazi istraživanja u kojoj se formuliraju različite hipoteze što ih kasnije treba testirati. Nakon što se istraže različiti diskursi – koji vide prirodu, društvo, politiku, ili sve to zajedno, kao uzrok nasilnog zla, i impliciraju različite ideje za njegovu kontrolu i iskorjenjivanje – te se Edyvaneova teorija testira u tim diskurzivnim okvirima, dolazi se do provizornog zaključka da je politički liberalizam možda najbolje što do danas imamo.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI Edyvane, zlo, ontologija, politička teorija, politička etika, književnost, film, nasilje, zločin