CIVIL ONTOLOGY

Andreas Beyer Gregersen

A conceptual exploration into the relation between ethics and politics

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This version of the dissertation does not contain the introduction to the first part (see table of contents, "PART ONE: TO BE OR NOT TO BE CIVIL") and the first chapter ("1. Forms and substance").

ABSTRACT

Civility is a concept that seems to point toward both the highest aspirations and the deepest confusion. It is often conceived by theorists as a normative ideal of political ethics; as, for instance, a communicative virtue within theories of deliberative democracy or as a culture of active citizenship within republican thought. But it is also a contested concept that for others points to a set of questionable norms that can exclude marginalized groups in society and prevent progressive change from happening. In addition, its use and meaning are further complicated by discussions about related expressions such as civil resistance, civil disobedience, and civil society. In this thesis, the overall question is how we can understand the relation between ethics and politics through the concept of civility. To provide an answer to this question, I develop what I will call a 'civil ontology' by both exploring the reach of the concept and providing a broad but meaningful conception that interprets civility as *the dynamic relation between ethics and politics*. In this sense, I propose that civility provides us with a valuable interpretation key to this relation.

The thesis consists of two main parts. In the first part of the thesis, I begin by analyzing and discussing how particularly liberal and critical theoretical conceptions interpret civility and what it might say about the relation between ethics and politics. Through this analysis, it becomes increasingly clear that civility points to some form of dynamic relation between ethics and politics. The second part of the thesis builds upon these results and argues that civility can be meaningfully reconceptualized as a type of normative orientation whose defining feature is internal conflict but through this distinct way of being normative continuously connects ethics and politics. Overall, I will argue that we can thereby conceive civility as *a distinct mode of normativity*, irreducible to ethics and politics, that is inherently dynamic due to internal conflict. Civility constitutes the relation between ethics and politics as such because it is something distinct that develops 'in-between'. As such a transformative mode of normativity, civility can also be discussed and reflected upon anew regarding its role and value in different contexts. In this relation, I will suggest that civility is instrumentally valuable because it helps us to reflexively mediate and thereby transform the relation between ethics and politics. Even though there is no guarantee of this, civility tends to facilitate a reflexive mediation between ethics and politics. Thus, the civil ontology that is developed throughout this thesis conceives civility as a *continuous development* relating ethics and politics together.

RESUMÉ

Civilitet er et begreb, der synes at lede os hen imod både de højeste ambitioner og den dybeste forvirring. Det fortolkes ofte blandt teoretikere som et normativt ideal inden for politisk etik; som eksempelvis en kommunikativ dyd inden for teorier om deliberativt demokrati eller som en kultur for aktivt borgerskab inden for republikansk tænkning. Men det er også et omstridt begreb, der ofte fortolkes som et sæt af problematiske normer, som kan ekskludere marginaliserede grupper i samfundet og forhindre positive samfundsforandringer i at finde sted. Derudover er dets brug og betydning yderligere kompliceret af diskussioner om udtryk såsom civil ulydighed og civilsamfund. Formålet med denne afhandling er at udforske, hvordan vi kan forstå forholdet mellem etik og politik gennem begrebet civilitet. Til det formål vil jeg udarbejde en såkaldt 'civil ontologi' i form af både en nærmere undersøgelse af, hvad dette begreb kan betyde, og en genfortolkning af begrebet set ud fra forholdet mellem etik og politik som sådan. I den forstand foreslås det, at begrebet civilitet giver os *en værdifuld fortolkningsnøgle* til at forstå det forhold.

Afhandlingen består af to hoveddele. I den første del af afhandlingen vil jeg begynde med at diskutere gennemgående elementer og aspekter af, hvad teoretikere inden for især liberalisme og kritisk teori forstår som civilitet, og hvad det kan sige om forholdet mellem etik og politik . Gennem denne analyse vil det løbende blive mere klart, at civilitet implicerer en eller anden form for dynamisk forhold mellem etik og politik. Den anden del af afhandlingen bygger på disse resultater ved at argumentere for, at civilitet kan meningsfuldt begribes som en særlig form for normativ orientering, der indeholder og udvikler sig gennem internal konflikt, men som netop gennem en sådan udvikling forbinder etik og politik. I den forbindelse drages der især inspiration fra Étienne Balibars fortolkning af civilitet, fordi den placerer begrebet inden for en eksplicit ontologisk ramme, selvom dette er en politisk ontologi uden et særligt fokus på forholdet mellem etik og politik. Hvad jeg argumenterer for, er i stedet, at civilitet kan begribes som både en dynamisk kategori, der hele tiden udvikler sig i nye former, og samtidig hvad jeg vil karakterisere som *en særlig normativitetsmodus, der hverken kan reduceres til etik eller politik.* Civilitet forstået som en sådan splittet og transformativ normativitetsmodus kan samtidig tolkes som værende instrumentelt værdifuld i den forstand, at civilitet i sine forskellige former kan facilitere, at vi gennem kritisk refleksion udvikler forholdet mellem etik og politik. Civilitet kan dermed meningsfuldt fortolkes som den *kontinuerlige udvikling* af det spændingsfyldte forhold mellem etik og politik.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

"The dissociation between ethical and political is not only impracticable, but it is not by accident that it is not; yet on the other hand, this does not mean that the one is dissolved in the other. To the extent that one increases the specificity of both dimensions, their inextricability will become increasingly knotted."

Jacques Derrida
Negotiations – Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001

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INTRODUCTION:

CIVILITY RELOADED

What the relation between ethics and politics is, given that there is one, poses a theoretical challenge that both crosses moral and political philosophy and is relevant to how people practically engage with ethical and political matters. A concept in the academic as well as the broader public debate that is often said and theorized as something that connects ethics and politics is *civility*. However, civility is not a clearly defined concept, and the theoretical as well as practical implications of what civility means are also much contested. The question which this thesis poses is: *How can we understand the relation between ethics and politics through the concept of civility?*

As I will elaborate further in this introduction, I conceive 'ethics' in this connection as implying established normative practices, i.e., moral norms, and 'politics' as implying conflict through an organized space. It is already clear that there must be some relation between the two. On the one hand, moral norms can regulate political conflict by, for instance, establishing behavioral expectations between debaters or demarcating legitimate opinions from illegitimate ones. On the other hand, moral norms can also become contested through political developments. But what the relation between ethics and politics is as such, and how it is developed through such complex connections, is a theoretical issue that remains to be explored more in-depth (Bernasconi, 2015). Civility is not the only concept that might be useful for such an exploration but, as I will argue later, it is a concept that is particularly relevant since it has *both an ethical and a political meaning* and is often interpreted as a far-reaching phenomenon that is not limited to a particular culture. As I will show throughout the thesis, the remarkably wide range of meanings attributed to 'civility' by various conceptions makes civility relevant for an exploration into the relation between ethics and politics as such in a way which it does not seem that other ethico-political concepts provide.

In this thesis, the overall approach is to first analyze and discuss liberal and critical theoretical conceptions of civility and, on this basis, to develop a reconceptualization that points to the relation between ethics and politics as such. I have chosen to focus on liberal and critical theoretical conceptions of civility because they both offer distinct approaches which reflect the wide range of

different ways that civility and what it implies about the relation between ethics and politics are conceived today. On the reconceptualization that I will develop and argue for, civility is a way of being normative that connects to both ethics and politics through its defining characteristic that is a continuous development of *internal conflict*, which entails a potential for critical reflection on ethico-political issues. In this sense, civility is *the* dynamic relation between ethics and politics.

In this connection, the reader might also have noticed that I do not distinguish between the terms 'ethics' and 'morality' in this thesis. I will outline and argue for my conceptualization of both ethics and politics in a separate chapter before the main parts of the thesis. Briefly put, I interpret ethics and politics as *two different ways of being normative*. While ethics handles and manages normative problems through established practices, politics confronts and develops them through organized spaces of conflict. From this perspective, politics does not necessarily imply conflict between externally opposed actors such as disagreeing individuals, but it does provide a space for conflict between someone or something that is conflicting. Both ethics and politics are thus normative practices by implying a sense that something 'ought' to be done. The relation between ethics and politics must therefore be a relation between different ways of *practicing normativity*.

In this introduction, I will provide a preliminary presentation of civility as a concept and a clarification of my philosophical approach. The first section will present how this thesis progresses in two steps, which are to conduct an in-depth conceptual analysis and, on this basis, to develop a reconceptualization of civility. These two steps are distinct regarding both approach and focus but also connected since they complement each other in exploring the overall research question. The second section will provide a brief overview of how civility is both understood, theorized, and discussed today. The third section will argue for my conceptual approach to civility as a concept that implies both a limited range of possible meanings and a plurality of different ways that we can conceive the concept with various purposes. Finally, the fourth and final section presents the overall progression of the thesis and outlines my reconceptualization of civility in further detail.

A project with two steps

As an illustrative example of what the meaning and value of civility is, Ian Ward analyzes the historical ritual of dueling. According to Ward, dueling can show us different perspectives within the debate about what civility and its value are. As an increasingly elaborate ritual of conflict,

dueling developed through a discourse of courtesy and manners in the court culture of the Renaissance and became over the centuries less and less a matter of direct physical combat. Aggressive but subtle exchanges of words came to replace the deadly violence that we still associate with the very idea of a duel (Ward, 2017, p. 121). To Ward, such a development illustrates the often-heard argument that civility *pacifies*, or at least reduces, animosity through a set of 'rules of engagement' in a conflictual social setting. But what is often not discussed in theoretical discussions about civility is what the relation is between such rules of engagement and the political space that they are embedded within. For instance, is civility just a firmly established ethics that regulates political conflict, or can it also be changed in turn by political developments?

In this connection, the thesis follows two steps that are reflected through its two main parts. The first part aims to provide an in-depth conceptual analysis of what civility can imply with a particular focus on liberal and critical theoretical conceptions of civility. On the basis of this, the second part develops a reconceptualization of civility that gives us a more thorough understanding of the *ethico-political world* in which we live through what it can say about the relation between ethics and politics as such. What I will argue is that the concept of civility can provide us with a valuable interpretation key to how such a world of normative questions, answers, dilemmas, and conflicts both functions and develops. It is in this exact sense that I will also characterize such a reconceptualization as 'ontological' because of its broad scope. The Greek neologism "ὀντολογία" was first invented in the 17th century as another term for the idea of a 'first philosophy' that is usually attributed to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (Jaroszyński, 2018, pp. 93-94). But perhaps even more than its conceptual cousin, metaphysics, ontology has been and is still being used to designate not only a universal or all-encompassing inquiry into being as such but also a 'regional' focus upon certain beings amongst other beings. Such internal tension between a general and a regional focus may cause some confusion, but it is also one of the reasons why I have chosen this concept to characterize my overall approach. That is, even though my regional focus is on civility, the ontological point of view also implies a broader focus on the ethico-political world in which civility exists. In my conception, civility can only arise because we live in a world where *politics and ethics can and often do co-exist* since civility relates these two together in a dynamic way.

As the conceptual analysis in the first part shows, there are also other ways to meaningfully conceptualize civility than this with different purposes. Often, civility is conceptualized within a

specific tradition and thus a field of thought that provides the context in which the concept is thought to play a specific role. For instance, within theories about deliberative democracy civility is usually defined as a "cooperative virtue" or "communicative practice" connected to standards of social interaction (Rossini, 2019, p. 145). In theories that focus on a pluralist society with conflicting interests, it often connotes a more tragic tone by not being able to prevent the escalation of conflict but is still conceived as something that facilitates social interaction and makes it possible to co-exist – in the words of Stephen Carter, as "the sum of the many sacrifices we are called to make for the sake of living together" (Carter, 1998, p. 11). In more governmentally oriented and republican theories, civility is often thought of as what Philip Pettit describes as "good citizenship" in the sense of being engaged in supporting and developing just political institutions (Pettit, 1997, p. 245). In addition, within more culturally relativist theories civility cannot be restricted to only one particular culture but also implies a plurality of ways that a society can be organized. As Mark Kingwell claims: "Civility is culturally determined, sittlich, present in determinate form in given societies and not others", which means that even though civility does not exist in all societies there is some cultural variation in how it is both expressed and realized (Kingwell, 1995, p. 43). As I will analyze in the first part of the thesis, liberal and critical theoretical conceptions also provide each their own approach to interpret the concept of civility.

What makes liberal and critical theoretical conceptions particularly relevant to focus on and compare is that they both imply a distinct relation between ethics and politics but in two opposite ways. Broadly put, liberal conceptions of civility tend to focus on individual citizens, equality, pluralism, and the positive value of a regulated space of politics while critical theoretical conceptions instead tend to focus on collective action, inequality, domination, and the negative value of a regulated space of politics. In this sense, they both focus on how moral norms and political conflict are connected to each other through civility, but their analyses of what is at stake and their evaluations of civility radically differ. What I will show is that despite their differences liberal and critical theoretical conceptions both tend to imply a more static relation between ethics and politics, which means that it is mainly ethics that influences politics or the other way around. But, as I will argue, civility should rather be conceived as a dynamic relation between ethics and politics, as the second part of the thesis does, if it is *to fully capture what constitutes this relation.*

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Since the conceptual analysis of civility is so important for both steps of this thesis, it is therefore also relevant in this introduction to offer a brief overview of what is distinct about this concept and how it is often conceived and discussed. In the following section, I will provide such an overview in three steps. First, I will show that the ongoing debate about the meaning and value of civility is not only a theoretical issue but, particularly in an American context, also a subject of political debate. Second, I will focus on how contemporary theorists often conceive civility as a more static form of social order, which I suggest is related to its conceptual history. And last, I will show that civility contains both an ethical and a political dimension, which are two parts that do not clearly fit together. This duality within civility makes it also possible to be conceived as more dynamic.

A static or dynamic concept?

The meaning and value of civility are often highly contested, at least in an Anglo-Saxon context. On the one hand, you can hear appeals to civility in public space as a response to disillusionment with politicians, increased polarization, and a presumed dissolution of common values. On the other hand, such appeals can be attacked as forms of 'political correctness' or pernicious ideologies that exclude certain parts of the population by promoting strict rules and ideals. These different perspectives also seem to reflect different understandings of civility within both public debates and theoretical discussions: Proponents, who are often also liberal, mostly follow an interpretation of civility as *an active engagement* in society while critics, who include critical theorists, tend towards an interpretation of the concept as pointing to *a passive adherence* to established rules. These differences are particularly pronounced in the United States, where there has been an ongoing public debate about the meaning and value of civility over several decades. In 1996, Michael J. Sandel claimed that "calls for civility echo across the land", which might have been at least partly true, but *calls against civility* have also been common over the years (Sandel 1996).

Especially after the election of Donald J. Trump as president in 2016, it has often been stated that civility is under pressure in both the United States and other Western countries, which seems to imply that the critics of civility have 'won' the debate so far. However, calls for civility have also proliferated as a reaction to the perceived breach of civil norms in public life and politics. Such repeated calls are often aimed at a debate culture that is characterized as disrespectful as well as being full of insults and hate speech, to which many defend civility as what Stephen Carter has called an "etiquette of democracy"; an 'etiquette' that not only contributes to the legitimacy of

political culture but even makes it more effective and enduring in the long run (Carter, 1998). In this context, civility is often understood as *a communicative virtue* that might be more than just what we call politeness but not more than a personal character trait. For example, prizes and awards are given in large numbers every year in both the US and the UK to politicians who are praised for behaving civilly in the public, which is usually equated with decency, courtesy, and respect toward political opponents. In the aftermath of the Brexit debate, a whole set of awards called *Civility in Politics Awards* was even launched in 2019 by members of the House of Lords and different campaigners "to shine a spotlight on politicians who argue their case with decency and civility, and are able to engage with people across the divides that threaten to scar our country", as Labour peer Lord Wood presented these awards (Guardian, 2019). Decency and civility as both personal character traits almost seemed to be synonymous notions in the first presentation of these awards.

In theoretical discussions, civility has been questioned over the years by critical theorists such as Linda Zerilli, Wendy Brown, and Iris Marion Young as allegedly being a way of depoliticizing criticism and excluding people who lack the resources or refuse to follow the established 'rules of the game' (Young, 2000, pp. 53-58; Zerilli, 2014). Against the backdrop of this type of critique, newer conceptions have seemingly moved in two different directions in the latest years. One approach consists of attempts to reconceptualize civility as *a set of minimal norms* that at least most citizens are supposed to be able to follow, which is particularly common among liberal theorists who focus on a pluralist social setting such as Mark Kingwell, Jeremy Waldron, and Teresa Bejan. Another approach consists of attempts to expand the concept to characterize *an overriding social order* as, for example, Robert Pippin's interpretation of civility as a common ethos in modern society that realizes and protects freedom (Pippin, 2005). Such a larger social order can either be evaluated positively, as Pippin amongst others such as Slavoj Žižek and Eske Møllgaard does, or be criticized as well through a critical theoretical interpretation of civility as a pervasive tool of power as, for instance, David Theo Goldberg does. But overall, the first approach *minimizes* the range of civility while the second *maximizes* the range, even though there are also some conceptions that might be situated in between the two such as when civility is interpreted as an ethics for urban life amongst strangers that is not just a set of minimal norms but neither an overlapping social order (Boyd, 2006; Kim, 2010). In this connection, it does not seem to be a coincidence that, on the one hand, a more 'maximalist' theorist such as Pippin defines civility as the quality of a civil society since this concept can connect an understanding of what it means to

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be civil with a broader social order. On the other hand, more 'minimalist' theorists focus rather on the concept in relation to more isolated practices such as civil disobedience that couples civility to a specific act which almost per definition cannot constitute a social order (Milligan, 2013, p. 36).

In this regard, both approaches tend to propose a conception of civility as an identifiable and relatively stable form of normativity within a given social context and mainly differ with regard to its scope. That is, both interpret it as *an established set of norms* whether this is characterized as having a small or large range, which means that societal change does not play a significant role. Even though it is definitely not all theorists who conceive civility as a more static category, which I will also show in both parts of the thesis, there seems nonetheless to be a certain tendency to do so both within and outside of academia. This is presumably connected to the inheritance of its conceptual history. In this connection, it is worth noting that civility has previously been much more closely connected to the concept of *civilization*, even though the normative connotations of civilization are disputed today and not as connected in linguistic usage to civility as before. Émile Benveniste has argued that a 'division of labour' between the two concepts previously existed on a semantic level because the ending '-ty', or '-té' in French, connoted a state of being – the quality of being and continuing to be civilized – while the ending '-ization' instead connected the noun closely to its corresponding verb (Benveniste, 1971, pp. 289-297). In other words, you civilize or become civilized but you *are* civil. In this sense, civility was earlier perceived to be an end result after a civilizing process. This unique conceptual history might also be one of the reasons why civility is in a lexicon such as *Dictionary of the Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (2004), which claims to present terms that defy easy translation from one language and culture to another. However, in contrast to the hyperbolic and perhaps ironic title of the before-mentioned dictionary civility does get translated between languages, cultures, and national borders despite its proclaimed 'untranslatability', which might also change how it is used and understood as an English concept.[1]

Another part of the inheritance from the conceptual history of civility is that it has both a moral and a political meaning, which are two parts that do not necessarily fit together in a stable way but,

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[1] Thomas Metzger has, amongst others, noted the difficulty that Chinese intellectuals often have with translating civility into Mandarin which, to Metzger, is because of the difference between the "un-utopian" meaning of this Western concept and Chinese notions of an 'absolute' morality and politics, in which harmony is set as the standard perspective (Metzger, 2001, pp. 213-214). But regardless of whether this characteristic of Chinese culture is accurate, it is questionable whether Metzger's association of civility with political conflict constitutes *an insurmountable barrier* to translation as such; as if other languages only refer to a conflict-free world.

as I will argue in this thesis, can also influence each other in a more dynamic process. From a political perspective, civility is particularly associated with citizenship, civic virtue, and the regulation of conflict. Even though civility is often said to belong within a particular kind of society such as a liberal democracy, conceptions of civility can also imply, either explicitly or implicitly, considerations of what *politics as such* is about and what it should be. This is particularly clear in those approaches that emphasize the persistence of political conflict. As I will show, Étienne Balibar's conception provides a noticeable example of this by positing civility as a central concept within a political ontology. To use a relevant expression by William E. Connolly, there is an "ontopolitical dimension" to many conceptions because they imply a broader reach about what politics is and how it develops (Connolly, 1995, pp. 1-2). But at the same time, it will also be shown throughout the first part of the thesis that civility is a concept that does not only relate to politics. Briefly put, civility just as much connotes sociability, customs, and behavioral norms in ways that at times seem quite far from power relations, public debates, and political conflict. This is, for instance, the case when civility is only interpreted as a form of ethics for how to behave amongst strangers in public life. In relation to this duality within civility pointing to both ethics and politics at once, Balibar describes its conceptual history in the eighteenth century as follows:

"In the Classical Age (in the debates between philosophers of the Enlightment à la française and representatives of the Scottish Enlightenment), the term played a crucial role in the definition and critique of the relations between the idea of progress and the autonomization, vis-à-vis the royal authority, of the society known, precisely, as "civil". The uses of the term tended, however, to be distributed between the poles of "private life" (politeness, friendship) and the "public sphere" and government (police, civic-mindedness)" (Balibar, 2015, p. 163).

In this regard, what is called 'private life' by Balibar is often also interpreted as an integral part of what civility is since, for instance, the interactions between friends and family members are also guided by normative standards and ideals that can be associated with civility. Many newer conceptions of civility do not restrict this other dimension to a closed private sphere but use it in various ways to characterize a form of ethics that cannot be reduced to politics despite its entanglement with the former. As it will be shown in the second part of the thesis, Geneviève Souillac provides a noticeable example of such a conception that posits civility as a constitutive force of ethics within politics which is not, however, identified with political practice since it rather

seems *to support politics from below*. In this sense, Souillac identifies civility with ethics more than politics, even though it is at the same time related to a political framework. Although contemporary conceptions do not focus as much on what civility might say about *ethics as such* compared to the broad perspective on politics, there also exists what I will oppositely call an 'ontoethical dimension' of many conceptions because they do imply some considerations about what moral norms are and how they develop. This is, for instance, the case when civility is conceived as a set of minimal norms within a pluralist setting, which posits civility at the limits of what ethics can be in certain contexts. In this sense, contemporary conceptions to some degree imply ontological perspectives that have a broader reach of both an ontopolitical and an ontoethical character, despite that civility can also be interpreted as a phenomenon within a limited social context. But, even though most conceptions do imply a relation between ethics and politics, it has not been explored *how the ontopolitical and ontoethical dimensions of civility connect together*.

In the following section, I will elaborate on the conceptual approach that is applied in both the analysis and discussion of liberal and critical theoretical conceptions in the first part as well as the reconceptualization in the second part of the thesis. In relation to the ongoing debates about the meaning and value of civility, I will first begin with a brief discussion of what it means to analyze a contested concept such as civility and thereafter account for the two different strategies that I employ, which implies a conceptual focus on both semantic meaning and pragmatic differences.

Semantics and pragmatics

A challenge that an exploration of a highly debated concept as civility also faces is that it might be what W. B. Gallie famously called an essentially contested concept (Gallie, 1955). The central idea behind this notion is that certain concepts such as 'art' and 'democracy', according to Gallie, contain a conflictual nature, which implies that the ongoing discussions and controversies about their meaning express an essential contestation as an *intrinsic*, rather than extrinsic, component of the concept. In this sense, they cannot be provided with a clear definition. But whether or not the concept of civility is 'essentially contested', this would not in itself be a reason for claiming that a philosophical investigation of such a concept cannot lead to ontological insights. Ontology is not just a negotiation with the purpose of coming to a common agreement on meaning and language. As I conceive this notion, ontology is the work of *more and more far-reaching thinking through language*. In this sense, concepts that resist any broadly accepted meaning because they contain

clashes between positions and perspectives are not worse focal points than others for this type of work. Quite the contrary, critical discussion on the same contested concept can be a productive approach to gaining new insight, which the ongoing discussions about just as contested concepts such as equality, freedom, and justice also point to. However, one important dimension of contested concepts is that they often have what Carl Schmitt called a "polemical meaning" by being interpreted within an antagonistic framework that divides things into what should be defended and what should be attacked (Schmitt, 2007, p. 30). Thus, such concepts often point to something that they are said *not* to be, even though the meaning of such a clear negation might be just as contested. The conceptual opposite of civility is *incivility*, which can be applied polemically to brand certain practices and even actors as illegitimate. In this regard, I will also focus on the question of how to conceive the relation between civility and incivility in both the analysis of various conceptions that do include, either explicitly or implicitly, a notion of incivility as well as the development of a reconceptualization that posits both civility and incivility within a new frame. This is both because incivility is often theorized in close connection to the conceptions that I analyze in the first part of the thesis and because I will show in the second part that my reconceptualization also provides new perspectives on the relation between civility and incivility.

In contrast, making a merely stipulative definition of a contested concept might come with the cost of reducing the complexity that often makes such concepts worth reflecting upon. If a concept constitutes the 'battlefield' itself, a mere stipulation would mean a lack of engagement in the ongoing discussion on what it means.[2] Reflection upon a contested concept can, in return, provide theoretical insight into not only the range of possible meanings but also where we seem *to lack clear answers*, which is what the first part of the thesis aims to do by analyzing and discussing liberal and critical theoretical conceptions of civility. As an illustrative example of another contested concept that is often reflected on today, the tension within the concept of 'democracy' between ideals about freedom, self-determination, and equality and an institutional set-up of, for instance, choosing representatives through elections makes the concept more relevant to engage

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[2] However, this is not necessarily the reason why there is not a more systematic focus upon civility within at least academic philosophy; why there is *no comprehensive theory of civility* as there is a famous 'theory of justice' and theories of concepts such as freedom, recognition, and community – concepts that are also contested in both popular and academic usage and that have probably received the attention they have partly as a result of not being self-explanatory. A more plausible reason is the persistent criticism of what civility is thought to imply and its associations with what some perceive as useless or harmful nostalgia. As Richard Sennett writes, "it is difficult to speak of civility in modern life without appearing to be a snob or a reactionary" (Sennett, 2017, p. 328).

with and discuss than if it merely referred to one or the other part. In this way, 'democracy' becomes more the entry to an important problem than the key to an established solution; a recurring problem about what seems to be a persistent but unstable relation between ideals and institutions.

Overall, the conceptual approach that is applied in this thesis can be divided into two strategies that follow the two main parts of the thesis. That is, while the first part analyzes and discusses relevant literature that theorizes civility in various ways, the second part unfolds a new conception of civility through sources and arguments that build on the results from the first part. In this sense, the first strategy is mainly *analytical* in the sense of mapping, analyzing, and discussing what liberal and critical theoretical conceptions of civility mean and what they say about the relation between ethics and politics. The second strategy is more *creative*, or 'synthetical', in the literal sense that it focuses on creating a meaningful conception but on the basis of the first part, which means that this conception is developed in dialogue with existing ways of conceiving civility. In this connection, I am like any researcher limited when choosing literature for a project such as this one by my lack of linguistic competencies in the languages of relevant publications on either direct translations of civility or similar concepts. Even though it would be worth considering as well whether concepts such as "civiltà" in Italian might render comparable insights, the focus of this thesis is on civility as a concept in the English language. Admittedly, this is partly because English has become the 'lingua franca' of academic work today. To which degree this thesis might also reach beyond the possible limits of this hegemonic language is up to future research to explore.

In relation to the ongoing debate about the meaning and value of civility, the reconceptualization that I develop is not an attempt to define the only correct way to understand this concept. Even though I am still critical of some conceptions of civility, as it will be argued in the first part of the thesis, it is also important that we not only recognize a *semantics* of civility that restricts its possible meanings but also a *concurrent pragmatics*; that we can use the concept for various purposes in different contexts. This is itself attested by the remarkably wide range of conceptions that are analyzed throughout the thesis. But, as already mentioned, the ongoing debate about civility in both academia and broader public debates does have an impact on its possible meanings in the sense that how people apply and understand the concept in general restricts the range of possibilities for conceiving it theoretically – that is, given that we still aspire to be understood. For instance, it would hardly make sense for others today if one dissolved any distinction between

civility and incivility because this is still so deeply ingrained in current usage. In the first part of the thesis, I will particularly be attentive to this aspect of how conceptions of civility are proposed and discussed in relation to civil society and civil disobedience that are, either explicitly or implicitly, often put in contrast to what is perceived as an uncivil society and uncivil disobedience. It might be objected that the semantics of civility furthermore cannot extend to the relation between ethics and politics as such, making the reconceptualization in this thesis 'unintelligible', but the conceptual analysis in the first part of the thesis aims to show the potential for such a broad range.

In the following and last section of this introduction, I will first present the research contributions of this thesis with a particular focus on what the proposed reconceptualization of civility is and how it can provide us with an answer as to what constitutes the relation between ethics and politics. Thereafter, an overview of the structure and progression of the different parts will be provided.

Research contribution and overview

Regarding how ethics and politics are thought of in both everyday language and theoretical discussions, it often seems as if a choice stands between positing the two as *mutually exclusive* – whether we prefer a 'realist' approach to politics or celebrate the moral consciousness of actors not fully caught in the corrupting arms of political interests – or as *mutually dependent* and complementary. Such a rather dichotomous choice between either separation or unification of the two, which I will discuss in a separate chapter before the main parts of the thesis, also provides a way of understanding differences between liberal and critical theoretical approaches. Liberal theorists often assume what Will Kymlicka calls a "fundamental continuity of moral and political philosophy" in the broad sense that ethics and politics are thought of as being complementary in the realization of a 'good' society (Kymlicka, 2002, p. 5). In this sense, political questions are often posed and answered in direct continuation of moral questions as well as the other way around. In contrast, many thinkers associated with critical theory such as Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek assert more discontinuity between moral norms in contemporary society and politics as both a field of struggle and a possible revolutionary birthsite of universal principles as another 'ethics in the making' (Badiou, 2002). Even though other critical theorists such as Jürgen Habermas, Axel Honneth, and Seyla Benhabib also argue that we do possess the moral foundations for developing and practicing, for instance, a communicative ethics in modern society, the critical impulse that defines critical theory must still imply that contemporary politics does not, at the very least, meet

its own standards. As I will show through the analysis of liberal and critical theoretical conceptions of civility, these differences are also reflected through their interpretations of single concepts. But how ethics and politics continuously develop each other through *a tension-full and open-ended process*, which I will argue that they do throughout this thesis, has seemingly not been theorized in-depth within either liberalism, critical theory, or other traditions in contemporary philosophy.

Contrary to a dichotomous choice of either separation or unification, I propose that civility can be conceived as the dynamic relation between politics and ethics, which neither implies a settled state of harmonious unity nor a mutually exclusive separation. Ethics and politics are, to some degree, bound to one another in a *continuous development*. This also means that both ethics and politics are deeply affected by their relations to what is outside of themselves because they are not only influenced continuously by each other but also by something in-between that constitutes this dynamic relation and develops in a distinct way. This 'in-between' is that which I call civility. In the second part of the thesis, I will argue that civility implies more concretely the emergence and development of normative orientations that through their internal conflict tend to produce what I will call a *contingency effect*. This effect implies an increased awareness that there is no single form that the relation between ethics and politics assumes once-and-for-all. Briefly put, civility does this by not only developing relatively stable formations of a normative character but also introducing and evolving conflicts, and thus normative tensions, through these formations. In this conception, civility does not just constitute a certain type of normative orientation that changes both of the two but also contains a continuous potential for both reflection and self-critique. Such a formation of civility can, for instance, be an articulated ideal that points in a certain direction but still contains conflicting interpretations of what it means or a gesture in public life that is recognized as a certain type of behaviour but is yet expressed and understood in conflicting ways.

Thus, I will propose a conception of civility as a constantly developing practice through which we continuously relate politics and ethics to each other. In other words, civility on this account provides a key to understanding how the relation between politics and ethics is developed through *a distinct and third way* of handling normative questions and issues. Civility is neither the conflictual space that we associate with politics nor the guiding patterns for action that we associate with ethics. It can be characterized as in between these two and yet distinct from both in the sense that it constitutes its own 'mode of normativity'. Mode of normativity is a term that will be

developed further in the beginning of the thesis. For now, it can be stated that the reason for characterizing ethics, politics, and civility as 'modes' rather than forms of normativity or normative approaches is that a mode can be defined as *a certain way in which something occurs* that always exists alongside other modes since it is not the only way in which it occurs. Thus, the concept of mode implies a reference to plurality, which is also often implied by the concept of 'form' or at least the expression 'form of x', but it furthermore has a processual aspect by referring to an occurrence that happens. Modes of normativity are ways in which normativity occurs, which shows how normativity does not exist in one single way. The mode of normativity that defines civility is *the combination of normative orientations and internal conflict within these orientations*.

A 'normative orientation' can be defined as a normative practice that is both relatively stable and points in a certain direction in the sense that it is *oriented toward* an identifiable issue or question that 'ought' to be approached somehow. Thus, it can range widely right from the formulation of ideals for how the world should be like to everyday routines and behaviors that we practice with the sense that they ought to be done in a certain way. In this connection, a normative orientation can also contain internal conflict if such a conflict still points in *the same direction*, which reflects the common orientation. This is, for instance, the case with conflicting interpretations of the same principle given that there is still an underlying sense that there is some common horizon. As its own type of normative orientation, civility does not simply refer to how moral norms can regulate politics, or how political conflict can question moral norms, but to the continuous development of such normative orientations that are located between ethics and politics. That is, civility as a third mode of normativity between ethics and politics is not defined by any specific norm such as respect, inclusion, or equality but by the internal conflict within certain normative orientations. In this sense, civility also has a more formal character because the 'content' of what is conflicting within these normative orientations can shift even drastically with *ethico-political developments*.

Overall, this dissertation provides both broader and more specific contributions to existing research fields. At the most general level, it contributes with *a new conceptual approach* to the question of the relation between ethics and politics, which might primarily be a philosophical issue but is also relevant for other disciplines that empirically investigate such a relation in practice. Regarding theoretical conceptions of civility, it delivers *an extensive analysis* as well as comparison of how this concept is grasped within those traditions in contemporary political philosophy that focus on

civility and its role, particularly in liberalism and critical theory. It also shows in-depth how conceptions of civility and their various approaches to ethics and politics are relevant to theoretical discussions on how we both can and ought to interpret the concepts of civil society and civil disobedience. Finally, with the reconceptualization of civility as *an internally divided mode of normativity* the thesis also provides a novel way to analyze and 'mediate' the differences between liberal and critical theoretical approaches to the question of what value civility might have. In this way, such a conception shows that the differences between these two are not insurmountable since they both tend to imply a more static relation between ethics and politics as a common departure.

Throughout the dissertation, and particularly in the final chapter, I often refer to actual examples from particularly literature, history, and contemporary politics. One reason for doing this more than presenting hypothetical situations or thought experiments is to continuously showcase the interpretative potential of the conceptual approach. From this perspective, the examples are not only illustrations of ideas but also exemplify the potential for finding and analyzing even more examples of the conception that I develop. This is also the reason why many examples have been selected from around the world since I aim to show that both the ongoing discussions about civility and the conception that I develop cannot be limited to a Western context. Many of these examples are applied in a merely *illustrative* manner, which is usually signaled by their brief presentation and analysis. In other cases, the examples also play a theoretically *formative* role, which is either stated explicitly or signaled by a more extensive discussion. In this sense, such examples are more than simply heuristic tools since they also point to certain ambiguities or uncertainties that are not already resolved at the theoretical starting point. Even though they do not overturn or radically change the direction of the inquiry, the formative examples are perhaps better described as being able to *elucidate*, or perhaps even 'illuminate', the theoretical work rather than just illustrate it. In a discussion of Slavoj Žižek's baffling use of examples, Robert Pfaller mentions that we often hierarchize the relation between ideas and examples such that the examples are thought of as particular and replaceable 'subordinates' standing under one general and overarching framework (Pfaller, 2012). According to Pfaller, Žižek questions such an implicit hierarchy by treating his examples as being *on a level playing field* with that which they exemplify. Even though I do not go as far as this, examples are also given a more prominent role on the 'playing field' of this thesis.

This relates as well to the conceptual approach that is applied and developed throughout the thesis. In a reflection on what conceptual work in philosophy is about, Étienne Balibar notes that the etymology of the term concept ("conceptus" in Latin) refers to both an appropriation of an object as well as a wholly new creation, an inception. The verb "concipere" in Latin could also literally mean to generate life within a womb; to 'conceive' a new type of being. In this sense, conceptual work is also a creative activity. However, Balibar emphasizes that such activity must be directed toward achieving a better understanding of our common world – that is, "we need concepts because we seek intelligibility, whether it is about nature, passions, or politics" (Balibar, 2020, p. 56). It is because of this aspiration for understanding that conceptualizations often take a leap with the aim of capturing something 'out there' that has not been made intelligible until now. This is also the ambition of this thesis: To better grasp in an intelligible form what the concept of civility can say about the relation between ethics and politics through a careful reconceptualization. Given that civility can indeed be theorized as having such a broad ontological reach, this form of conceptual exploration is an endeavor that perhaps even warrants its own title. That is, if political ontology is an exploration of what 'political being' means in the broadest sense possible while metaethics is a similar exploration of ethics as such, this is rather an exercise in what we might call *civil ontology.*

<center>***</center>

Overall, the thesis is divided into first a single chapter about what will be characterized as the ontological framework for the whole thesis and thereafter two main parts. The single chapter before the two main parts provides a clarification of what I mean by 'ethics' and 'politics' in the first place as well as a preliminary interpretation of the relation between the two without a reference to civility as a possible interpretation key. This is of methodological significance for the whole thesis by clarifying the guiding question about the relation between ethics and politics that constitutes a common thread in both main parts. In the first part, *To be or not to be civil?*, existing conceptions of civility associated with liberalism and critical theory will be thoroughly analyzed and discussed with a specific focus on how these conceptions address the relation between ethics and politics. In continuation thereof, the first part will also conduct such a conceptual analysis in two separate chapters on what can be conceived as civil in the concepts of civil society and civil disobedience. These two chapters confirm the previous analytical results about how civility is most often conceived as a more static relation between ethics and politics while demonstrating how

civility is conceived similarly in different contexts. Thus, the first part provides both a broad overview of liberal and critical theoretical conceptions of civility as well as an exploration into the ontological reach that it can imply across these two theoretical traditions. The second part, *A division that relates to itself*, will present a reconceptualization of civility that builds on the analysis and discussion of conceptions of civility conducted through the first part. It will do so through the development of a conception that interprets civility as a more dynamic relation between ethics and politics which exists and develops through internal conflict. The two chapters on civil society and civil disobedience leading up to the second part of the thesis also provide a basis for this reconceptualization because the discussions within these chapters show that it can be meaningful to conceive the civil in civil society and civil disobedience as being both dynamic and conflictual.

As mentioned, the thesis begins with a single chapter before the two main parts. This chapter, *Ontological framework*, is divided into four steps: 1) It provides an analytical frame to grasp the various possibilities for how to interpret the relation between ethics and politics today, 2) It discusses a selection of theoretical approaches that explicitly focus on the relation between ethics and politics, 3) It offers an elaboration and clarification of how I conceive the two concepts separately, 4) It develops a preliminary interpretation of the relation between ethics and politics as both tension-full and open-ended, which provides a cautious starting point for the rest of the thesis.

There are four chapters within both of the two main parts. Overall, the progression of the first part is that the first two chapters show that both liberal and critical theoretical conceptions most often conceive civility as a more static relation between ethics and politics but that this poses unresolved questions because the same conceptions also point to an internal dynamic between formal and substantial aspects of civility that does not fit such a static relation. I will suggest that this problem is inherently connected to the ways in which the relation between ethics and politics is most often assumed to be one of unidirectional influence where *mainly one part influences the other*. The next two chapters confirm these analytical results by showing that the same type of problem arises in interpretations of both civil society and civil disobedience. These two chapters also complement each other in the sense that they show how the difficulties with meaningfully capturing a relation between ethics and politics through the concept of civility arise both when being civil is connected to something that is perceived as being more stable and enduring such as a 'society' and when it is connected to something perceived as more unstable and conflictual such as 'disobedience'. In

these two chapters, I will also focus more on how it is possible to interpret the civil in both civil society and civil disobedience as dynamic, which will function as a precursor for the second part.

The first chapter within the first part, *Forms and substance*, shows that both liberal and critical theoretical approaches tend to interpret civility as a more static type of social order but also that the persistent division between formal and substantial aspects within these conceptions points to an internal dynamic that is theoretically undeveloped. In this sense, it remains a theoretical problem for both liberal and critical theoretical conceptions that the division between formal and substantial aspects does not clearly fit together with a presupposition that civility is something that fundamentally remains the same over time. In this connection, I will also demonstrate how this problem arises with conceptions that display both liberal and critical theoretical aspects. The second chapter, *Political ethics, ethical politics*, shows how both liberal and critical theoretical conceptions tend to imply some relation between politics and ethics but also that they most often interpret this relation as mainly one part influencing or even determining the other. As I will argue, the problem with this is not only that it does not easily fit with the division between formal and substantial aspects but also that it does not account for the mutual influence between ethics and politics that I already point to in the chapter before the first part of the thesis. The third chapter, *The civil in civil society*, will focus on how the civil part of civil society has been theorized through both liberal and critical theoretical approaches, in which I will show that conceptions of the civil in civil society also imply both formal and substantial aspects as well as some relation between ethics and politics. In this regard, I will particularly discuss the idea that the public/private distinction is the central feature that any civil society is substantially about. The fourth chapter, *The civil in civil disobedience*, will conduct the same type of analysis for the civil part of civil disobedience. This means that I will show how liberal and critical theoretical conceptions also in this context point to a relation between ethics and politics as well as different forms of civil disobedience which are difficult to align with an idea of one 'substance'. In this regard, I will particularly discuss the influential notion that civil disobedience is substantially a collective action.

Overall, the progression of the second part is that the first two chapters develop how we can meaningfully conceive civility as a dynamic relation between ethics and politics with, first, a focus on the boundaries of civility and, second, a focus on its internal dynamic. This means that I will first propose that the boundaries of not only civility but also incivility are set by *the ethico-political context* in which they both emerge and develop. As a second step, I will propose that conflict can

meaningfully be conceived as the internal dynamic of civility if it is posited between ethics and politics. The two next and final chapters develop this further by binding these two aspects about the relation between ethics and politics constituting the boundaries of civility as well as conflict constituting its internal dynamic together through an ontological interpretation. The analysis and discussion of Étienne Balibar's conception provide an important stepping stone in this endeavor since it shows us how civility can be conceived as a constitutive part of politics as such, which continuously transforms the constitution and boundaries of politics itself. In this sense, Balibar's conception is treated as *a paradigmatic example* of interpreting civility within an ontological framework. On this basis, I will develop a conception of civility as a continuous transformation of not only politics but of ethics and politics at once through its own mode of normativity. In this regard, I will furthermore describe civility as not only 'metapolitical', which is the term that Balibar applies to civility, but also 'metaethical' because it is *boundary-changing on two fronts*.

The first chapter within the second part, *Incivility is 'in civility'*, begins the development of a reconceptualization of civility with a focus on the boundaries of civility as well as the relation between civility and incivility, in which I will show that both civility and incivility can meaningfully be conceived as belonging to the same ethico-political context. In this sense, the boundaries of '(in)civility' are also the boundaries of the relation between ethics and politics because both civility and incivility only arise and develop in between the two. The second chapter, *The possibility of a third way*, will develop my proposal for how to conceive the internal dynamic of civility through a discussion of two prevalent approaches to the role of change in civility, which I will characterize as, respectively, 'historicist' and 'universalist'. The historicist approach will be discussed with Edward Shils as a representative of this approach, and the universalist approach will be discussed with Geneviève Souillac as a representative. On this basis, I will finally propose that it is most meaningful to develop a third way between these two approaches for capturing an internal dynamic of civility, which is to conceive civility as constantly developing itself through internal conflict. In this regard, I will also argue that such an approach is not deconstructive in the sense of positing internal limits to the realization of civility or claiming that civility is somehow 'non-rationalizable', even if it might appear so at first sight. Briefly put, conflict is not a so-called 'condition of impossibility' for the realization of civility if internal conflict is a defining feature.

The third chapter, *An ontopolitical conception*, analyzes and discusses Étienne Balibar's conception as a paradigmatic example of an ontological approach. In this connection, I will

interpret civility in relation to the two other concepts, emancipation and transformation, that Balibar posits as central to understanding politics as such. I will argue that even though this provides a convincing approach to interpreting civility as a metapolitical boundary-changing practice it does not clearly relate politics and ethics together. In addition, the distinction between transformation and civility as two separate concepts also makes it difficult to theorize an internal dynamic within civility itself. The fourth chapter, *A distinct mode of normativity*, will finally build on the previous three chapters to systematically present a reconceptualization of civility that continuously mediates between ethics and politics through its internal conflict and therefore also, from a more ontological perspective, constitutes an interpretation key to the relation between ethics and politics as such. I will develop this conception in three steps. First, I will show that civility can be conceived as changing the boundaries of both ethics and politics at once. Second, I will develop the idea that civility exists and develops through internally conflictual formations. And third, I will argue that civility on this account harbors a continuous potential to reflexively mediate between ethics and politics, which is valuable in an ethico-political world that seems to 'call for reflection'.

ONTOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this first chapter is to clarify what we can understand as ethics and politics in the first place, and how these two might be related to each other, as a methodic basis for the two main parts of the thesis. In this connection, it will become clear to the reader that the discussions and elaborations presented in this chapter function as markers of direction for the dissertation by clarifying how I interpret the two concepts and providing a preliminary interpretation of their relation to each other. Thus, this chapter can also be said to provide an *ontological framework* by developing a preliminary understanding of the ethico-political world that civility can be conceived as being a part of. I underline that it is *preliminary* because this chapter does not answer in advance what the relation between ethics and politics is. But the chapter still sets the stage for the rest of the thesis by clarifying what I mean in the first place when I pose the question of what the relation between ethics and politics is. This entails, for instance, that I will note and discuss in both parts of the thesis when some of the analyzed theorists conceive ethics or politics in slightly different ways than I do, but I will not change my own interpretations of the two concepts for that reason.

The chapter is divided into four parts. The first section will present a broad analytical frame to approach and discuss the question of how ethics and politics relate to each other. Briefly put, this analytical frame distinguishes between a fully continuous relation and a fully discontinuous relation as two opposite extremes on a wide spectrum of possible interpretations, which means that ethics and politics can be thought of as both closely connected and nearly separate from each other. In the second section, a selection of theoretical approaches and specific theories that can be placed differently on this wide spectrum is analyzed and discussed. I will argue in this section that the relation between ethics and politics is not fully explored by these theories with a particular focus on a series of lectures by John Dewey as well as Paul Ricoeur's writings on the topic. The selection of theories in this section has been made with the aim of both showcasing the wide range of different approaches and discussing theorists who explicitly claim to focus on the relation between 'ethics' and 'politics' or between 'morality' and 'politics'. It is most likely possible to include many others in such a discussion through interpretations of what various theories implicitly say about the relation between ethics and politics, but for the sake of both clarity and brevity I have only selected noticeable examples of theories that explicitly do so. It might be objected that this

selection also privileges theoretical approaches that tend toward assuming more separation than unification between ethics and politics because explicitly distinguishing between ethics and politics implies some discontinuity in the first place; that they are not entirely the same thing. However, it is outside the bounds of this project to extensively interpret possibly relevant theorists who might propose a more close relation, or even a 'union', but do not explicitly state this because it is not characterized as a relation between ethics and politics using these two separate concepts.

The third section will take a step back from this discussion and clarify how we can meaningfully interpret ethics and politics as individual concepts before relating them together. In this way, I aim to bring more clarity to the discussion and position my approach in relation to those that are presented and discussed in the previous section. Briefly put, I will develop and argue for the idea that ethics and politics can be thought of as two partly separate modes of normativity. Based on this, the fourth section will propose as a preliminary interpretation that the relation between ethics and politics is both tension-full and open-ended, which will be elucidated through two selected examples and a short literary analysis of a novel by Ursula Le Guin. This interpretation provides a starting point for both assessing what liberal and critical theoretical conceptions imply about this relation and developing a conception of civility that helps us to understand how it is constituted.

A (dis)continuous relation

As already mentioned in the introduction, civility seems to be a nearly 'schizophrenic' concept in the sense that it can be interpreted in both an ethical and a political light (Edyvane, 2016, p. 345; Meyer, 2000, p. 71). As I will analyze in-depth in the first part of the thesis, most conceptions of civility also point to some sort of relation between ethics and politics. But as I will show in this section, there are widely different interpretations of what the relation between ethics and politics implies in the first place. Simply put, one extremity within the multiple ways of conceiving the exact relation is to interpret the two as *fully continuous* or as so intimately connected that they might as well refer to the same thing. The opposite extremity is to view them as *fully discontinuous* in the sense of constituting separate spheres or practices. These extremes do not capture the actual positions of most theorists, but they can still be applied in this context as two 'ideal types' which as analytical tools can elucidate the ways that we do interpret such a relation today. It is also worth noting that both extremes can hardly be described as a *relation* between ethics and politics in a strict sense because being fully continuous implies being one and the same while being fully

discontinuous implies being entirely separate from one another. In this regard, I will later argue in this chapter that both extremes are right from a certain perspective; that there are *both clear continuities and clear discontinuities* between ethics and politics if we follow the idea about ethics and politics being partly separate modes of normativity, which I will argue for as being meaningful. But before this, I will in this section apply the before-mentioned analytical frame of a spectrum with two extremes at each end to introduce how ethics and politics can be positioned in relation to each other theoretically and why there are so many different interpretations of this relation today.

Both 'politics' and 'ethics' are words used in everyday speech and across societal spheres, not to mention their numerous variants and translations into various languages. Even though the etymology of both leads us back to an Ancient Greek context – from politics to πολῑτῐκός ('politikós') and from ethics to ἠθῐκός ('ethikós') – it is clear today that they cannot easily be understood within the same frame of interpretation. That is, while politics relates to a societal level, ethics – as well as its conceptual cousin, 'morality', deriving from "mores" which was originally coined by Cicero as a translation into Latin of ἠθῐκός (Harper, 2009, p. 1064) – implies more often a limited focus on individuals and interpersonal relations. While politics is also mostly applied descriptively such as when it refers to the organization of states or of society in general, ethics tends to be used as a more normative notion by referring to something that 'ought' to be done. Even though ethics and morality are at times distinguished in a way that posits either one of them as merely being a descriptive category referring to social norms, the other concept in such distinctions is still designated as a matter of what ought to be done, whether it is ethics or morality that is given this exact role.[3] But, as I will show, it is also difficult to provide a clear-cut distinction between ethics and politics. They might even be so entangled with one another that we cannot understand one category without, at least, an implicit reference to the other. If this is the case, the relation must also be more continuous than discontinuous. But it is important to note that this does not necessarily imply a 'harmonious' relation since there might also be considerable tension and conflict *because* they are closely linked. Oppositely, an idea of politics and ethics as two nearly self-enclosed practices can imply a relation without conflict, which is a view on this question that I will particularly discuss with the lectures on political ethics by John Dewey in the next section.

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[3] In the article "Ethics versus morality: A problematic divide" from 2009, Sarah J. Harper provides an overview and discussion of the ways that ethics and morality are distinguished in contemporary philosophy (Harper, 2009).

There is also a historical dimension to the differences in how the relation between ethics and politics is conceived. It seems at least that politics and ethics in so-called 'non-modern' contexts such as Ancient Greece were more often thought of as a coherent unity based on an overlapping cosmology. In contrast to this, one of the main reasons why Niccolò Machiavelli is usually classified as a modern thinker is because these two concepts partly diverges in his writings, such as when Machiavelli famously declares in *The Prince* from 1532 that the political ruler should learn how not to be good (Primoratz, 2007, p. xii). It is also striking for a contemporary reader that, for instance, Aristotle in *The Nicomachean Ethics* equates the study of ethical questions with a study of politics and claims that the good of man is realized through a good state (Aristotle, 1999, p. 4). As Robert Bernasconi notes, Aristotle did not really distinguish between moral and political philosophy as two branches of study in the way that we do so today, despite his use of some phrases that indicate a sort of separation (Bernasconi, 2015, p. 200). But even if the separation of ethics and politics is truly a 'modern invention', this does not entail that it has now become impossible to conceive any form of unity as before. For the purposes of this thesis, it will suffice to state that since I discuss several contemporary thinkers in this chapter who pose a clear connection between ethics and politics, I also do not think that it is impossible today to conceive a coherent unity and thus a more continuous relation between the two. In this sense, we are not forced to be modern.

There also seems to be at least a tendency to conceive the relation as being more continuous today. For instance, the approach within contemporary philosophy of describing political obligations and principles as what R. M. Hare calls a "subspecies" of morality clearly points to continuity (Hare, 1989, p. 8). Such a perspective is most often expressed in theoretical approaches that are designated as 'political ethics' (Crookston, Killoren, & Trerise, 2017). The idea of a political ethics implies that the sphere of politics constitutes one amongst other areas in which morality can extend and develop through a particular set of circumstances. Republican conceptions of politics such as Hannah Arendt's influential theory of what she designates as "vita active" even seem to suggest that we only become truly moral when we act in the political realm. To Arendt, the political realm is the very name for the common space in which people act and speak freely together – a space that "gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other" – and therefore the only realm where actions usually designated as ethical such as trust, forgiveness, and respect unfold between not only family or friends but universally within the "society of men" (Arendt, 1998, p. 52). In this sense, it is politics understood as a public realm that provides the openness – or what

Arendt also calls "worldliness" – required to act not only to survive as human beings but to provide a more lasting meaning to the world that we both share and divide between us. Thereby, a form of political ethics that is said to be more important than other kinds of 'non-political' ethics promotes the idea of a continuous relation between ethics and politics. Arendt's approach also illustrates that such a continuous relation can be both conceived and promoted theoretically in a modern context, even if Arendt was inspired by classical antiquity in developing her views on ethics and politics.

In the following section, I will analyze and discuss a selection of approaches and theories that can each be placed differently on this wide spectrum between a fully continuous and a fully discontinuous relation. At first, I will focus on approaches that posit ethics and politics as more discontinuous, which can be either positively valued by assigning them different roles or functions that complement each other or instead criticized by claiming that one part lacks the qualities of the other part. John Dewey's lectures on political ethics will be discussed as a noticeable example of the first view, while particularly the so-called 'dirty hands dilemma' will be examined as expressive of an approach that is more critical of a discontinuous relation. Paul Ricoeur's writings on the topic are thereafter analyzed and discussed as representative of an approach that posits a more continuous relation, even though I will also emphasize that Ricoeur nuances this issue by highlighting both continuities and discontinuities, which I draw inspiration from in the rest of the chapter. In this connection, the next section will also show that how we conceive this relation hinges on different interpretations of ethics and politics as more separate concepts. It might be objected to the next sections that I have omitted one or the other relevant theorist who would have provided another perspective on these questions, but this can hardly be avoided when that which is explored, the relation between ethics and politics, is not exclusive to one theoretical tradition.

Complementary or conflicting?

One common way of conceiving ethics and politics as complementary to each other is to posit ethics as that which provides us with the answers for what is valuable in this world and politics as that which provides us with the means and opportunities for acting upon these answers in a societal context. But such a perspective also entails that politics in a certain sense always comes 'too late'; that political developments cannot alter but only realize a normativity that is set in advance. This position is noticeably presented in John Dewey's lectures on political ethics from 1896 where Dewey operates with a clear-cut distinction between ethics, politics, and economics as *three*

societal spheres. This categorization might not represent Dewey's later thoughts on these issues, but it illustrates quite clearly what such a way of framing the relation in question implies.[4] In this regard, the purpose of the following discussion is not to provide an interpretation of John Dewey's authorship or social philosophy as such but instead to highlight a certain theoretical way of ascribing separate roles to ethics and politics, which is particularly pronounced in these lectures.

In the lectures, the ethical domain is defined as one that revolves around conscious values embedded in our continuously evolving activities. Ethics is *the* matter of what ought to be done – and thus of normativity in the usual sense of the concept. Economics is, on the other hand, a matter of procuring the means that are required to continue and develop moral activities further, which Dewey also designates as "mechanism" and even "machinery" to signify the instrumental character of this type of activity. On this account, economics must therefore secure resources such as not only food and shelter required in a well-functioning society but also cultural traditions and, in a broader sense, both collective and individual capabilities that make it possible to behave properly in situations that 'demand' us to act in accordance with certain values. For instance, economics in this broad sense also implies cultural traditions and institutional arrangements that allow us to rest occasionally to focus on ethical issues instead of being caught up in constant work. But where is the place for politics in all of this? According to Dewey, politics can be defined as "a question of adjustment of the two, or the technique"; the deliberate effort to organize the available means in the pursuit of certain ends (Dewey, 1998, p. 148). But even though Dewey develops throughout his career an experimentalist approach to ethics implying a processual perspective without pre-given standards, politics on at least this account does not seem to be an integral part of such an experimental process. That is, the role of a political endeavor must only consist of a concern with *the realization of already given values* since it is about 'adjusting' the relation between our values and our means to realize those values. In this sense, politics as an adjustment 'technique' cannot also problematize and develop our values but only focuses on realizing them.

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[4] This tripartition of societal spheres does not seem to reoccur in Dewey's later and more famous work in social and political thought such as *The Public and Its Problems* (1927) and *Freedom and Culture* (1939). Even though it is outside the bounds of this project to explore further, this presumably relates to the shifting influence of G. W. F. Hegel's dialectical metaphysics and particularly his political philosophy on Dewey's thinking throughout the years because Hegel also distinguished between separate but complementary societal spheres (Renault, 2016).

Or so it seems at first sight. Dewey's lectures from this period are notoriously dense with a cryptic style of expression. One important aspect of Dewey's approach in these lectures is that his conception of society is explicitly *organicist*; society is conceived as an organic and functional unity (p. 143). But it is also a dynamic unity in which there are not just interlocking parts but also overlapping phases. These phases can possibly also surpass each other in the sense that society develops through, for instance, having a more political phase that is afterward continued by a more economic or a more ethical phase. In this regard, ethics, politics, and economics might also be understood as three such phases within an overall process of social development, even though it is unclear in this line of thought whether there is an endpoint where one of these phases becomes the final one and, in some sense, incorporates the others. But regardless, they all share a common ground which is a society that develops itself as an organic unity through *an internal differentiation over time and space.* If this is so, ethics and politics can also be interpreted as partly continuous since they are both part of a larger unity. However, this does not seem to change that politics and ethics do play significantly different roles and are discontinuous by constituting separate spheres.

According to these lectures, ethics and politics complement each other exactly because they are prescribed separate tasks that, at least in principle, work together. One of the things that is problematic about operating with ethics and politics as such distinct categories, which Dewey in these lectures seems to do, is that it presupposes that at least most societal practices which are not economic can be divided into being about either defining values, as ethics does, or realizing them through the available 'economic' means, as politics does. In this sense, it is not open to the possibility that there might also be considerable grey areas in-between such as when moral questions are posed and reflected on during a political realization of a given value. For instance, moral dilemmas often refer to a situation or thought experiment in which it is not possible to realize something morally desirable given limited abilities or resources, which can either make one pragmatically reconsider one's values or maintain a more 'idealist' stance. In this sense, politics as a question of adjustment between values and means can by itself provide *a space for questioning what values we ought to strive for*. Debating whether utopian ideals about everlasting happiness or freedom and equality for all are undesirable exactly because they are unrealistic seems, for instance, to blur the boundaries between ethics and politics on Dewey's own account. Politics must also have an instrumental character just as economics if it only realizes established values without anyone, at least intermittently, reflecting upon or openly questioning some of these values along

the way. But even if it is possible to maintain such a clear-cut differentiation between ethics and politics, it seems at least rather counterintuitive to define politics in such a manner, which I will also return to in the forthcoming section on interpreting ethics and politics as individual concepts.

A similar problem arises for approaches that also operate with a separation between ethics and politics but are more critical of such a separation and particularly of politics as a distinct societal sphere. To provide a clear example, Rob Sparrow claims that for politics to exist there must be a community that denies membership to outsiders without any reasonable justification. Through the turn of a common phrase, Sparrow's idea is that we, the members of a political community, are the true "barbarians at the gates"; that is, those who are on the safe side rather than those on the other side to whom we as political beings keep turning a blind eye. Sparrow's underlying assumptions for this are clear: "Whereas politics is inevitably partial, morality is universal" (Sparrow, 2007, p. 173). From this perspective, the relation between ethics and politics can only be *discontinuous* because politics functions through partiality and thus exclusion while morality is universal and thus inclusive in its basic orientation. However, such a claim seems to have similar counterintuitive implications as Dewey's previously discussed view on ethics and politics having separate but still complementary roles. First of all, there must be *a boundary problem* since if morality is always universal this seems to entail that it cannot belong to the limits and partiality of politics but exists somehow outside of politics. Perhaps, ethics and politics simply exist in different spheres, but what the boundaries between them are in a world where both ethics and politics play significant roles seems difficult to assess. At least interpreted in its strict sense, this view is also not open to the possibility of grey areas between the partiality of politics and the universality of ethics. Even if being partial and being universal contradict each other, we might still live most of our lives in between the two opposites. Perhaps this notion of politics as essentially partial is not as counterintuitive as the earlier discussed conception proposed by Dewey since we often think of politics as a space of conflict in which we all have different perspectives, interests, and agendas. However, it still seems to be rather counterintuitive to claim that more universalist approaches are thereby excluded from such a political space, if this is in fact what Sparrow claims. Even if political communities are always to some degree 'barbarious' in their exclusion of foreigners, politics can still *include* actors and voices that work for a less barbarious and more universalist community.

Another critical approach, which in contrast to the view expressed by Sparrow does not separate ethics and politics, consists in claiming that politics is particularly problematic from a moral perspective and might even *corrupt* ethics. In this sense, politics is not an amoral sphere or domain but is rather a sort of 'trouble in paradise' for anyone being moral. The idea that is often called *a dirty hands dilemma* can be interpreted as expressive of such an approach (Coady, 2008; Tholen, 2020). As it was already presented by Michael Walzer in 1973, the core idea is that even a supposed 'moral saint' is forced to make compromises in politics and that these compromises imply that she has to take responsibility for some immoral activities that cannot be avoided in the long run (Walzer, 1973). The most common objection to the idea of such a dilemma is that this misinterprets the simple fact that even someone with the best intentions must still act under sometimes *severely restricted circumstances*, which is a condition that also applies outside of politics (Nielsen, 2007). Walzer himself too acknowledges that the dilemma of sometimes having to do wrong in order to do good, so to speak, is not just a problem in politics but can also arise in "private life" (Walzer, 1973, p. 174). But what seems to be clear in not only Walzer's presentation but also other accounts of the dirty hands dilemma is an underlying assumption that politics understood as a domain of power makes it particularly hard to do right without also doing something wrong along the way.

Even though there may be wide possibilities of variation in the interpretation of exactly how special politics is compared to other societal spheres or areas of life, the dirty hands dilemma cannot make sense unless it is assumed that politics somehow changes the way we can act morally. To Walzer, this does not mean that we ought to abolish or minimize the role of politics, given that this is a possibility. Instead, we should value and promote the so-called 'moral politician' as the political actor who is troubled by the repeatedly occuring dilemma of getting dirty hands in different circumstances and nevertheless continues to engage self-critically in politics. But the question from a more critical perspective is, though, why we should not also seek to *disengage* from politics and minimize its role in society and our lives if politics has such a 'bad influence'. Since politics is most often associated with *the exercise of power* in this context rather than, for instance, the facilitation of conflict or the development of community, a straightforward approach could be to work for a society with less exercise of power through more equal relations between people. Even if we cannot abolish 'politics' in this sense, it may still be possible to reduce its role. In the following, I will examine Paul Ricoeur's writings on the relation between ethics and politics in connection to this question since Ricoeur clearly states that politics is also *necessary for ethics*.

One response to the dirty hands dilemma is to agree that politics *is* problematic from a moral perspective, but that it is the only way we have to realize ethics. Ethics must take the troublesome path through politics to be realized through at least our human communities and contemporary social life. Paul Ricoeur is a clear proponent of this view by arguing that there is no sphere other than politics in which ethics can realize itself. Without politics, conceived by Ricoeur as the organization of historical communities through states and citizenship, ethics would tend to degenerate and ultimately disappear since it would not have a societal basis on which to develop and maintain itself. Particularly, the modern state constitutes such a societal basis for freedom and mutual recognition to exist and develop. But the problem, to Ricoeur, is that such a process of realization must remain *incomplete* because politics also implies a historical process which partly contradicts the moral values that it simultaneously realizes. This is clearly expressed in Ricoeur's several characterizations of so-called 'political paradoxes' that, as Pierre-Olivier Monteil notes, all revolve around a clash between, on the one hand, a normative ideal such as equality and, on the other hand, the historical reality of power and violence inherent to states in particular (Monteil, 2015). In this sense, the 'paradoxical' condition is that what Ricoeur interprets as the organization of social life and community both *partly realizes our values and partly obstructs this process*.

For instance, Ricoeur describes such a political paradox as one between "form" and "force", characterizing the form as the regulative and 'rational' idea of the state as an institution that guarantees equality before the law and the force as the illegitimate and 'irrational' reality of power relations that excludes equality and, to some extent, always implies violence. As Ricoeur sees it, "a residual violence continues to afflict even the State that comes closest to the ideal of a State of law, for the reason that every State is particular, individual, empirical" (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 324). In this sense, even though Ricoeur insists that there is a continuity between politics and ethics, there must also be *a persistent discontinuity* if it is the case that ethics points to ideals that are partly transcendent while politics is the name for the incomplete historical realization of these ideals. However, there is not much space in this line of thought for the idea that politics can also change our ideals from within by, for instance, questioning what is valuable about equality before the law. Similar to Dewey's lectures, politics nearly becomes a type of 'handmaiden' to ethics from this perspective in the sense that politics is also ascribed to the task of realizing already given values.

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Yet, Ricoeur also problematizes such a discontinuity in his writings. This happens, for instance, when he refers to Max Weber's famous lecture *Politics as a Vocation* (1918) and its conceptual distinction between an *ethics of ultimate ends* and an *ethics of responsibility*. To Ricoeur, this means that politics splits ethics into two parts; one defined by a persistent focus on ideals as well as the pursuit of excellence and another defined by an orientation toward what can be realized within a given historical context, which might be interpreted as a difference between 'idealism' and 'realism'. Thus, Ricoeur seems to propose a conception of ethics as something that is internally split between transcendence and immanence. That is, the ethics of ultimate ends points to a partly transcendent sphere of established values while the ethics of responsibility points to the more immanent limits of this world that give us 'dirty hands'. However, what is not mentioned by Ricoeur is that Weber does not himself claim that politics causes such a division inside of ethics. Quite oppositely, Weber writes that it applies to "all ethically oriented conduct" that we get caught in dilemmas of whether to pursue good ends when it comes with the cost of morally dubious or even dangerous means (Weber, 1965, p. 54). According to Weber, these dilemmas apply to everything from moral questions about warfare to religious ethics. In this sense, the reality of there being opposed guiding principles of ethical conduct – something that might also be particularly widespread in political matters – rather brings politics and ethics closer together than it separates them. Both seem now to be inherently split between a part that can be characterized as fundamental, ideal, and 'rational' and another part that is historical, pragmatic, and 'irrational'. Thus, it is not only politics but also *an inherent part of ethics* that can obstruct its own realization.

At first sight, ethics as such cannot both refer to a transcendent sphere of values and to an ethics of responsibility with moral dilemmas far from any such sphere since this must entail that ethics is, once again, paradoxically *both unconditional and conditional*. Ethics cannot be both an unconditional demand to realize ideals and a pragmatic adjustment to reality. But, according to Ricoeur, it is possible to claim that ethics is "forever wavering" between these two poles that, as already mentioned, can be characterized by the dichotomy between transcendence and immanence, even though Ricoeur also applies other dichotomies such as fundamental and historical as well as rational and irrational in his writings (Ricoeur, 2007, p. 246). In this sense, there is just as much an 'ethical paradox' as a political paradox because ethics continually goes against itself. But nonetheless, similar to the dirty hands dilemma it still seems that *the trouble begins with politics* or that politics is the notion that captures this inevitable split within ethics itself because politics

is repeatedly characterized as the cause and foundation for its occurrence. As Ricoeur writes about this constant wavering of ethics, "the split is the ever bitter fruit of political existence driven into madness" (Ibid.). Thus, politics seems to be that which drives any moral subject 'mad' in the sense of being split between different demands and commitments that cannot be reconciled in any way.

However, politics is not simply the obstruction of ethics but always refers to ethics, even though such a reference to moral norms is repeatedly undermined by its own practice. Since Ricoeur assumes that politics is connected to "the State" as an institution, the 'political paradox' is that states, to Ricoeur, at the very least condemn murder as *a basic ethics*, but even this fundamental injunction not to murder is constantly broken by states through, for instance, the death penalty and warfare. States most often seek to legitimize this by distinguishing sharply between legally sanctioned murders such as those committed as death penalties and illegal murders that are usually committed by private actors. But, at least to Ricoeur, the fundamental injunction not to murder does *not* allow us to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate murders since this would justify the act of killing other human beings that cannot be justified under any circumstances. Just as ethics refers to politics through its own split existence, politics thus also points to a basic ethics that, to Ricoeur, is about the essential value of human dignity, even if this is often disavowed in practice. According to Ricoeur, throughout Western history this has primarily been expressed and developed through the fragile relation between secular law and religious ethics. Such a relation has never completely broken apart, but it is inherently fragile because it depends on *some common ground* to persist and evolve. As Ricoeur claims, "in the last resort, what links politics to ethics, order to charity, is respect for the person in his life and in his dignity" (p. 242). With Ricoeur's concepts mentioned earlier, an ethical 'form' continues to persist in politics despite its 'force'.

This position, which seems to rely on a more idealized conception of politics in the sense that politics on this account always carries or refers to certain ideals and values, can also be compared to Rob Sparrow's previously discussed notion of politics as inevitably partial. To Ricoeur, politics is *both* inevitably universal and inevitably partial in the sense that states as political actors both refer to universal principles of ethics and violate these principles in practice due to their limitations as historically situated and partial, which is the inevitable *ethico-political paradox* to confront. In this sense, Ricoeur points to the possibility of theorizing a more complicated relation than ethics and politics being described as either complementary or conflicting with each other. However, it

still seems as if a series of dichotomies persists through this entanglement between ethics and politics such as immanence and transcendence, particularity and universality, history and that which is fundamental. These divisions could also be just as entrenched and enduring as Ricoeur proposes. But even if this is so, they do not by themselves provide an explanation as to how ethics evolves through politics as well as how politics develops through ethics. Instead, they provide an interpretation as to why it is that both seem to be so ambivalent and tension-full in our societies.

Ricoeur explicitly suggests that we should conceive the relation between ethics and politics as an "intersection" rather than either a unified convergence or a clear-cut division (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 325). Simply put, an intersection implies a partial overlap between different entities, which also seems to follow from Ricoeur's claim that ethics and politics contain something of each other through the ways that they are both constituted; that ethics can only be realized through politics while politics can only exist through a reference to ethics. But Ricoeur does not focus as much on what the specific character of this intersection might be since the focus is mainly on the paradoxical split between two parts that they both share, which only explains that politics and ethics overlap but not what happens when the 'political paradox' and the 'ethical paradox' intersect. In other words, the problem is that Ricoeur does not consider if there is a difference between the tensions that exist within both ethics and politics and *the tension that exists within the intersection between the two*. In this sense, the relation between ethics and politics as theorized by Ricoeur does not seem to have a distinct character that differs from where ethics and politics do not intersect. But since Ricoeur does theorize ethics and politics as not only pointing to the same thing but also as being discontinuous in several respects, their intersection must be constituted in a distinct way.

Later in the final section of this chapter, I will argue that such an intersection can meaningfully be characterized as tension-full and open-ended, which means that *something distinct happens* when ethics and politics are related to each other which does not happen when they do not relate. But in the next section of this chapter, I will focus on how we can meaningfully interpret the two concepts in the first place since it is clear by now that different conceptions of ethics and politics also entail different interpretations of their relation to each other. In this connection, I will propose and argue that a meaningful interpretation is to conceive these concepts as two at least partly different modes of normativity since such an interpretation captures common intuitions about the two concepts while it also makes it possible to theorize both continuities and discontinuities between them.

To conclude this section, it has become clear that whether we conceive the relation between ethics and politics as being either more continuous or more discontinuous as well as more complementary or more conflicting to a large degree rests on how we interpret the two concepts in the first place. Most of the examined approaches and theories posit ethics and politics as *already established 'entities'* without considering and investigating closer how their relation to each other might also change their constitution and boundaries in a distinct way. Paul Ricoeur is partially an exception to this since he does propose a relation in which they are inherently connected. But how both ethics and politics develop seems to be determined by an internal split that they both share expressed through a series of dichotomies instead of the relation between the two. In this sense, ethics and politics do intersect but the intersection does not seem to be anything other than the circumstance that ethics and politics both contain *the same internal split*, which divides them from within. As mentioned, Ricoeur also points to a mutual influence between ethics and politics, but he does not theorize in-depth how such a mutual influence might function and develop over time. With this in mind, the next section of this chapter will provide a closer examination of how we can conceive ethics and politics as individual concepts as a basis for interpreting their relation to each other. In this regard, I will begin by examining as well as conceptualizing first 'ethics' and then 'politics'.

Taming and staging normativity

Even though Max Weber does not elaborate on the matter, it seems as if politics to Weber accumulates and intensifies the problems with ethical conduct, which puts even more responsibility on the one who has chosen politics as what Weber calls a 'vocation'. From this perspective, the relation between ethics and politics is *a matter of degrees* as to the extent of those problems rather than a qualitative difference. But what is it about the constitution of ethics in the first place that makes it possible to also interpret ethics as being inherently problematic and tension-full? In the following, I will argue that both ethics and politics involve normativity as a common feature, which means that they both imply a reflective gap between 'is' and 'ought'; a sense of difference between what reality is and what reality should look like. In this sense, normativity expresses the fact that we are as normative beings not entirely 'at home' in this world but repeatedly, if not all the time, assert and act on the assertation that it should be changed somehow. This also entails that both ethics and politics point to *a sense of lack*, a flaw in the world that the moral and political actor has at least not yet resolved. Regarding ethics which I will focus

on first, a clear theoretical example of how such a sense of lack can be defined as a constitutive part of being moral is Simone de Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947), in which she emphasizes the crucial role of "the element of failure" in any kind of ethics because 'ought' has not been turned into 'is' yet. According to de Beauvoir, a being that would coincide perfectly with itself without any difference between its being and its "having-to-be" could not even act ethically. There is simply nothing that such a being should do, as it is always already doing what is right without any moral consciousness; that is, "one does not offer an ethics to a God" (Beauvoir, 1948, p. 9). In this sense, ethics only applies to mortal beings who cannot as gods arrange the world in a perfect order.

From this perspective, a realist equation between morality and natural laws also dissolves ethics as a notion since some sense of disparity is implied in saying that we ought to do something. Even if there is such a thing as unchanging moral truths, ethics does not simply point to their existence but rather refers to the gap that seems to persist between such truths and our practices.[5] If there is one correct answer for how the world should be, ethics is not simply that answer by itself but *the ongoing process* of at least attempting to find and adhere to such an answer. This aspect to how I conceive ethics relates to Judith Butler's claim that every ethical subject is what she calls "dispossessed" of its own emergence and existence. That is, we do not fully possess control over ourselves and our practices as moral agents, which is because the conditions for our actions such as our childhood and upbringing continue to elude our grasp. In this sense, we are moral beings because we are, once again unlike 'gods', not the fully autonomous center of our own actions and lives (Butler, 2005, p. 110). Within certain traditions such as theoretical psychoanalysis, this constitutively fallible and often also distressed subject is interpreted as a key to philosophical anthropology since it is claimed by some theorists that this notion of subjectivity is also that which defines the human subject. For instance, Henrik Jøker Bjerre argues that what he calls the "formula of humanity" can be characterized as that way of being in which something always appears as missing, which often makes one wonder "how it all adds up" (Bjerre, 2018, p. 72). But regardless of whether being normative is connected with being human, ethics also implies a sense that things do not 'add up' since the gap between is and ought poses an *unfinished task for the moral subject*.

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[5] Thus, such a conception of ethics does not fit into a morally perfect world. To paraphrase de Beauvoir, one does not offer an ethics to a perfect world. However, since it should be clear that we are far from living in that kind of world this conceptual delimitation does not seem to entail any loss of analytical purchase for a project as this one.

But, at least not in the usual sense of the concept, ethics is not simply the experience of failure and distress about something that ought to be done. Ethics is also about providing some guidance for how to act. My proposal is that we can meaningfully conceive ethics as a way of, metaphorically, 'taming' normativity in the sense that *ethics is about making it easier to handle the reflective gap between is and ought*. Thus, we do not eliminate the sense that something still ought to be done but we find some way of handling it.[6] Such a conception can also be associated with what we often refer to as the 'ethos' of mores and traditions; more established practices that serve the purpose of making it easier to orient ourselves toward what de Beauvoir as mentioned called a 'having-to-be', which otherwise might elude our grasp. In other words, ethics is about acts and thoughts that partially stabilize our often troubling sense of there being something that ought to be done. This also means that 'moral norms' do not refer to distinguishable entities that exist independently of our actions but are in themselves *stabilizing practices of a normative character*. Ethical theories can also function in this way by, at least partly, providing stabilizing guidance for our actions – such as in Kantian deontology the axiom of an unnegotiable dignity of every human being. In this connection, it is not surprising that intuitions regularly play a role in such theories because intuitions provide a sense of orientation and sometimes answers to normative questions, even though intuitions can also be questioned through theoretical discussion (Chappell, 2015). Thus, the answers for how we should act are in moral practice often thought to be nearby, whether they are situated in a local context or perceived to be universally given independently of our position.[7]

An illustrative example of ethics that has been analyzed by Michel Foucault is the use of ὑπομνήματα ('hypomnémata'), which were notebooks widely used in classical antiquity to reflect upon one's way of life. These notebooks thus played a role as self-written guides that at least some citizens used to write down and memorize quotations, examples, and arguments about how they

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[6] Such a metaphor of taming can, though, be misunderstood as an end result rather than as a process in the sense of *a continual attempt* to handle normative questions and problems. To which degree ethics can be said to 'succeed' in different circumstances is a more open question where it might also be the case, as Raymond Geuss claims, that "any attempt to think seriously about the relation between politics and ethics must remain cognitively sensitive to the fact that people's beliefs, values, desires, moral conceptions etc., are usually half-baked (in every sense), are almost certain to be both indeterminate and, to the extent to which they are determinate, grossly inconsistent in any but the most local, highly formalised contexts, and are constantly changing" (Geuss, 2008, p. 3).

[7] This 'quest for certainty' is a characteristic that also differs from the persistent uncertainty in politics. But, as I will argue, it is too simple to derive from this a clear-cut separation between the two as Alexis Tocqueville does, at least rhetorically, in his remarkable claim that "in the moral world, therefore, everything is classified, coordinated, foreseen, decided in advance; in the political world, everything is agitated, contested, uncertain" (2010, p. 70).

ought to live their lives. As Foucault also stresses, these notebooks should not be interpreted today as personal diaries revealing the true self of the specific person in question – at least not viewed from the author's own perspective. Rather, the notebooks functioned as ethical orientations that guided the citizens in their attempts to realize what they thought of as a 'good life'. In this context about how to live one's life and relate to oneself, ethics is therefore about constituting such a personal relation that provides guidance for how to act and encircles *one's supposed having-to-be*.

If ethics is thereby a way of at least partly stabilizing normativity, what is politics then? In contrast to ethics, politics often refers to a situation where our orientations and answers to normative questions are thoroughly put in doubt and contested. Sometimes, politics as a concept is equated with the establishment and development of bounded societies, as in the etymological sense that refers to the ancient city-state, or with the distribution of resources and power as in the title of Harold D. Laswell's seminal book *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (1958). However, such widespread definitions do not cover the many ways that we also talk about issues in workplaces, associations, and even families as sometimes being political. Particularly, they do not point to the element of conflict that seems to be a pervasive intuition when we talk about politics. That something has become 'political' or 'politicized' within a societal setting often means that it has become the subject of dispute. We do still tend to associate political matters with the modern state as a domain or, a bit broader, the organization of a society. The point here is not to disregard this common intuition but to shift our perspective a bit by pointing out that even though conflict is often developed and posited within a certain society and its specific organization it can also emerge across societies and within social contexts that are not clearly set within one society. If politics is about *developing conflicts through an organized space*, as I will argue, this does not require that such an organized space is necessarily an established societal setting since it can also be constituted by other arrangements such as global media platforms that do not belong to one single society.

In this sense, I do not presume that the practice of politics is necessarily dependent on the existence of a nation-state or even a bounded community, but the space of politics is often established and regulated by a society of some sort such as when a public sphere is widely dependent on a nation-state and a national culture. The organized space of politics can thus be connected to some form of community, which implies mechanisms of both inclusion and exclusion, but it might also be an arrangement that we do *not* consider as being part of any community between us. For instance,

speaking a common language often provides such a space for politics but simply sharing the same language is not necessarily the same as belonging to the same community unless we stretch the notion of 'community' beyond recognition to include any case where something is common.[8]

As Samuel Chambers puts it in a discussion of Jacques Rancière's work, politics seems to be "subject to an original taint" of inner disunion (Chambers, 2013, p. 58). One might say that the 'taint' of disunion emerges in a certain sense already with normativity as such that posits a gap between is and ought and thus a sense of lack. But what Chambers perhaps points to is that politics does not constitute any established orientation with answers for how to act, as ethics does, but confronts this sense of lack in an open space without any pre-established solutions. In that way, politics also implies that normative issues are 'staged' within some field of symbols, actors, and relations, which is also a recurring focus in Rancière's work. The metaphor of *staging* might not be appropriate in all respects since it, for instance, can be associated with having fixed boundaries between the stage of politics and what is outside of the stage. But it does imply the relevant perspective that staging politics means that there is *a somewhat organized space* on which to confront normative problems. Simply put, politics does not belong to a 'psychotic' state or is another name for uncontrolled warfare, even though it might lead to such states of being. Politics implies a space through which normative problems can become both recognized, developed, and contested, even while this space might change and be reorganized by an evolving cross-pressure.

As already referred to, 'conflict' is a relevant term in this context. In a certain sense, normativity as such and thereby also ethics contain at least *a minimal degree of conflict* through the constitutive sense of a difference between is and ought. But it is only in politics that conflict develops through a space that can facilitate not only interaction between conflicting practices, ideas, and perspectives but also clashes between opposing actors whether these are individuals or collectives. At least in a normative context, conflict is presumably always disturbing for us since it implies a tension-full confrontation between either someone or something. Conflict is not necessarily political since there might not be an organized space for a particular conflict to develop. However, politics is

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[8] A conception of politics as the organization of human communities, or 'societies' if one prefers, but without a constitutive element of conflict is presumably easier to relate to a notion of ethics given that any organized community must rely, at least to a minimal degree, on some shared moral norms. But, as mentioned already, this does not capture what we usually mean by saying that something is being 'politicized'. Furthermore, it does not adress what is often thought of as *the theoretically challenging aspects* of what the relation between ethics and politics might be because the presence of conflict often questions the moral norms that are related to politics.

necessarily conflictual since it facilitates an ongoing confrontation with the fact that normativity as such is always *internally divided between someone or something* that might be, for instance, disagreeing political parties, opposing ideologies, or societal practices that work against each other. If nothing else, politics facilitates a confrontation with the initial conflict between a sense of what reality is and what it should be, which the tension-full relation between 'realism' and 'idealism' as two partly different approaches can also be said to express. In this connection, it is a more empirical question to which degree politics can be located just as much *within* as between individuals and collectives in the sense of, for instance, a political space that also facilitates reflection upon conflicting intuitions within us about what to do. But regardless, politics must be organized in some way. Just as ethics does not imply any harmonious whole, neither does politics signify any disintegration in which every structured way of dealing with normativity falls apart.[9]

These two main elements of the conception of politics that I propose – *conflict* and *organized space* – also relate to what Oliver Marchart analyzes as two main 'traditions' or lines of thought in newer political philosophy (Marchart, 2007, pp. 43-47). On one hand, there exists a so-called "Schmittian tradition" that focuses on conflict as a key to political ontology, even though not every theorist within this tradition follows Carl Schmitt's distinction between friend and enemy as essential to any kind of politics. On the other hand, there also exists an "Arendtian tradition" which oppositely emphasizes community and solidarity as the ontological key in a similar manner as Hannah Arendt and her emphasis on common action as being authentically political. In this regard, the divided field of political philosophy can be perceived as a symptom of the fact that what should be considered as 'truly' political and what is valuable about how politics functions and develops are still controversial matters. But, to Marchart, the crucial point is that these traditions can be interpreted as pointing to separate tendencies *within* politics rather than radically different conceptions. In this sense, politics itself implies a difference between what Marchart calls a "dissociative moment" and an "associative moment" that together creates and develops *the field of tension* that we so often recognize as political. In relation to the proposed elements of politics,

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[9] Such a notion of politics is also different from ideas about what is sometimes called 'the political' that often refers to *a conflictual aspect of social life in general*. For instance, Oliver Marchart characterizes the political as the "contingent as much as conflictual nature of social facts", which at least seems to be an *unorganized* condition (Marchart, 2018, p. 29). However, Marchart does define 'politics' as a certain kind of organized approach to the political, which to Marchart requires a series of conditions to emerge such as strategy, partisanship, and collectivity. In comparison, the conception of politics applied in this thesis is more inclusive to focus on that which I propose is most essential as to its relation with ethics; namely, that politics constitutes a distinct mode of normativity.

it might be said with these expressions that the 'dissociation' of conflict is both facilitated and regulated by the 'association' of an organized space, even though politics on at least the conception that I propose does not necessarily require that this space is established by an association in the form of a community. In this sense, the conflicts and organized spaces of politics are always related somehow but in a manner that can lead to *widely different interpretations of what politics is about.*

But regardless, the combination of both conflict and organized space helps to explain why politics often arises in circumstances where we might not have expected it to arise. For instance, politics often seems to 'come and go' in societal activities such as sports, arts, and entertainment since there already is an organized space of, for instance, sports regulations and aesthetic standards, to which there only needs to arise some form of conflict in such a context for a political setting to emerge. From another perspective, there are probably also tensions within various parts of our social life that are never articulated and developed further through an organized space of politics. But when these tensions are brought onto such a space that facilitates their development and makes them *appear in a different light* this also makes the setting political, whether it is a family picnic or an international conference. As a simple thought experiment, it is easy to imagine an ongoing tension within a family that is not articulated but remains for some time as a 'silent disagreement' through conflicting behaviors and agendas in everyday life. However, the moment it becomes articulated through a shared language and perhaps even mediated through simple procedures ("let's vote about it!"), it becomes political exactly because the conflict in question develops through a minimally organized space. From this perspective, politics often implies 'acting in concert', as Hannah Arendt famously put it, but just as much *acting in division* because the organized space of politics can facilitate a mutual confrontation with tension-full differences.

To conclude so far, ethics and politics both imply normativity, the sense that something ought to be done in this world, but they do so in distinct ways. Metaphorically, ethics 'tames' while politics 'stages' normativity and its internal division between a sense of what reality is and what it should be. This means, roughly put, that ethics is mainly *solution-oriented* while politics is rather *problem-oriented*; ethics seeks for answers to normative issues while politics confronts questions with no clear answers. But does this point toward a more discontinuous or a more continuous relation between ethics and politics? In the following and last part of this chapter, I will propose that the relation must be both continuous as well as discontinuous in the sense that their connection

is inherently tension-full and dynamic, which can also result in an *oscillation* between these two modes of normativity being either conflicting or complementary to each other. To this purpose, I will analyze three selected examples that in each their own way point to such a tension-full relation. The examples are thereby meant to provide us with insight that further discussion of theories could not provide in the same way because they constitute concrete instances of the relation in question.

The first example is the rise and development of the September 2007 demonstrations in Burma, which is used to examine how ethics and politics can influence each other in an unpredictable process since the 'price' that moral practices often pay for pushing political conflict in a certain direction is that they become one more point of contention. The second example is a series of nightly negotiations with a deceased brother as it is reported by an English missionary visiting the Zulu in South Africa. This example elucidates the same kind of unpredictable process as the first one but from another perspective since the starting point in this context is that politics can also question even persistent moral intuitions but that the 'price' for this is often that the space of politics is itself questioned and perhaps shut down. In addition, the second example has also been selected because it furthermore points to the range of the conception of politics that I propose by allowing us to analyze negotiations within a set of dreams as an example of a space of politics. Finally, a selected novel by Ursula Le Guin will be analyzed in-depth as a third example because it shows how the relation between ethics and politics is not only one of mutual influence but also seems to imply *an open-ended dynamic* in which the two modes of normativity can continuously oscillate between alignment and misalignment, 'concord' and 'discord', so long as they co-exist. In this connection, the analysis of all three examples is meant to be more formative than illustrative in the sense that the theoretical development is both furthered and elucidated through the analysis.

Open-ended and tension-full

As earlier discussed in this chapter, some theorists claim that politics can alter, trouble, and perhaps also 'corrupt' moral norms. From this perspective, ethics and politics are related to the extent that ethics cannot remain at a distance from a conflictual space of politics. However, the direction of influence might also go the other way. This is the case whenever a specific type of morality becomes so forceful that it regulates or pushes politics in a certain direction and perhaps even reduces its conflictual space considerably such as when the expression of disagreement is deemed inappropriate in a certain social setting. But, as I will show, the relation between the two is not

stabilized through such a mutual influence. At least to a certain degree, some tension between ethics and politics both remains and develops even further since the influence of ethics can provoke resistance from opposing norms and practices within the conflictual space of politics, while moral norms can at the same time also question what exact place and role, if any, politics should have. This *evolving tension* is what I will focus on through the analyses of the following three examples.

As mentioned, the first example is the September 2007 demonstrations in Burma that were primarily led by a network of Buddhist monks to protest the military regime's removal of fuel subsidies leading to massive price increases across the country. At first, monks in Pakkoku who started to appear on the streets only chanted 'metta sutta', a religious message of kindness to all living beings. However, in this context where student protests in Rangoon as the largest city had already taken place with mass arrestations following thereafter, such chanting was right away interpreted as part of an ongoing protest. In this regard, the monks' religious ethics that was now being brought on to the streets forcefully pushed the politics of these demonstrations in a certain direction exactly because it was at the same time *not* politicized to the same degree as the more secular part of the protests. It was only after local authorities started to physically assault monks, which sparked widespread outrage, that they also began to act as more political actors by being engaged in formulating concrete political demands and organizing the protests (Fink, 2009, p. 356). Nevertheless, the alliance of monks formed a markedly different network of protestors than other parts of the pro-democracy movement simply because they could make *a unique moral appeal*. In this complex situation, the tension between the struggle against oppression and the monks' religious as well as ethical care for the suffering of all living beings produced unpredictable effects in both the protest movement and Buddhist society.[10] The monks could make a unique moral appeal, but this appeal was *simultaneously politicized* and thus contested as to its meaning and significance in such a conflictual context. In this manner, ethics can change the course of political developments, but it might come with the 'price' of becoming another point of contention.

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[10] Such tension might also elucidate Jacques Derrida's brief comment on the relation between ethics and politics stating that "to the extent that one increases the specificity of both dimensions, their inextricability will become increasingly knotted" (Derrida, 2002, p. 306). That is, within a conflictual situation such as in Burma the more an ethical stance is enhanced with an 'increased specificity' in the sense that it becomes increasingly connected to broader societal practices and developments the more it can also become 'inextricably' entangled with politics.

In this regard, it might often be the persistence of moral practices throughout confrontations with uncertainty and difference that pushes politics in new directions. However, the mutual influence between ethics and politics also implies that political developments can question what at first sight seem to be firmly established moral practices, even though this might entail that the space of politics becomes questioned in turn. An example that can elucidate this distinct aspect of the mutual influence in question is to be found in Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power* (1960). In this book, there are several chapters that focus on how memories of the deceased in various cultures complicate the lives of the survivors. In one of these chapters, Canetti recounts a story written by an English missionary visiting the Zulu in South Africa, which regardless of credibility is relevant to analyze in this context because it, as already declared, also points to an ethico-political dynamic.

The story tells about a Zulu person whose elder brother has died, which means that he inherits the brother's property and particularly the cattle as is the custom. The younger brother does not, at first, feel guilty for any of this but after falling ill he is haunted in his dreams by the brother who demands sacrifices of the cattle (Canetti, 1978, p. 266). This leads to several nightly negotiations with his brother's ghost who seems insatiable and, as the younger brother realizes slowly, even causes a severe deterioration of his physical condition. However, the situation can only become so extreme because the idea of *a debt to the deceased* retains a significant force. To put it simply, the conflict and its tensions arise because he intuitively cannot make do with ridicule and dismissal. In this regard, it is worth noting that these nightly negotiations can be characterized as political on the conception that I propose since the younger brother continues to prepare for the negotiations and thus establish their recurrence and appearance during the night as, at least, *a minimal form of organized space* through which the conflict unfolds. It is clearly not the type of established and long-lasting space that we recognize from mainstream media or parliamentary debates, but this shows instead that politics can also arise as a more short-lived and minimally organized practice. Given that the older brother's ghost does not actually appear to the younger brother, the example also shows how a political conflict does not necessarily take place in a more external space between conflicting individuals or groups but that it can furthermore emerge and develop, at least partly, within what we usually perceive as the boundaries of both individuals and groups. In the case of the younger brother, the conflict is presumably related to social life and other political conflicts amongst the Zulu, but it is still a space of politics that mainly takes place 'inside' his own mind.

In relation to the mutual influence between ethics and politics, the younger brother continues to negotiate with his deceased brother night after night whereby he also questions the otherwise persistent intuitions about a moral debt that must be paid. The older brother keeps asking for 'meat' in the sense of a sacrifice of all the cattle, but the younger brother does not simply obey right away. However, after perhaps too many negotiations without any clear solutions and too little sleep the younger brother does succumb to the demands and sacrifices the cattle. This must presumably have closed this minimal space of politics once again with no more nightly negotiations, even though Elias Canetti argues that the shame of being 'the survivor' as opposed to a deceased relative is itself a considerable part of the conflict in question. Presumably, such shame did not by itself vanish through the sacrifice, but it might have been mitigated by it. Regardless, the example still points to an unpredictable process in which politics can question some moral practices such as sacrifices for the dead but also risks *being questioned in turn* and even shut down as a consequence.

In this connection, the previous example also shows that the relation between ethics and politics can be considered partly discontinuous in the sense that ethics can, at least in some cases, both prevent spaces of politics from arising and shut them down afterwards – as, for instance, the nightly negotiations with the deceased brother were shut down in the previous example. Oppositely, it is possible as well for politics to prevent certain moral practices from developing or to make others disappear again. However, it still seems that there exists at the very least some co-existence and connection between ethics and politics in the world that we live in today, and perhaps it is also a particular feature of modern society that *moral practices and political conflicts co-exist* despite the considerable tensions between them. In this connection, it seems difficult to assess in modern societies when and where ethics and politics does exist as truly separate, given that they do so at all, because the two are so often entangled with one another. For instance, at least some moral principles such as the strong condemnation of killing or torturing other human beings are today usually presumed not to be open and thus political questions. But there are, nonetheless, recurring debates about issues such as international warfare, terrorism, and euthanasia where such principles are, to some degree, still put into question. In this sense, it seems difficult to point to a moral principle that is not at least sometimes questioned and discussed within a modern space of politics.

As the third and final example, I will now turn to Ursula Le Guin's classic science fiction novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* from 1969 to focus on how the relation between ethics and politics can

be interpreted as an even more dynamic and open-ended process than in the two previous examples. As I will show through the literary analysis, such an open-ended process can oscillate between ethics and politics being in *alignment* by supporting and developing each other or in *misalignment* by having a more corrosive and perhaps even destructive influence on one another. In this sense, we cannot just state that politics is a 'corruption' of ethics or that ethics provides a stable basis for politics since such claims tend to rely on the idea that their relation to each other is unalterable and that it cannot also switch between what even seems to be opposite positions.

In the novel, the reader follows Genly Ai who is an envoy sent to a foreign planet on behalf of a confederation of different planets in the universe. Genly Ai is sent alone to this quite cold planet to persuade its nations to join the large confederation but becomes slowly entangled in political conflict both within and between the two quarreling nations on the planet. After nearly dying in a far-northern concentration camp, he is rescued by a former prime minister from one of the nations, Estraven, who sincerely believes in Genly Ai's arguments that these two nations will benefit from together joining the confederation of planets. On their long and perilous journey back from the concentration camp, Estraven asks at one point why Genly Ai has been sent alone when it is clearly also a very difficult and dangerous mission. Genly Ai responds that it is an established custom for the confederation to send envoys alone to foreign planets and that there are several reasons behind this custom, even though Genly Ai is not sure if he fully understands them. But most importantly, it is not just a strategic decision to signal that the confederation is not sending an invasion army to new planets but instead a single messenger carrying an open and peaceful invitation. As Genly Ai comes to phrase this, there is moreover a 'mystical' reason behind which seems to revolve around a form of intense connection that can arise in the interaction between the envoy and the new world:

"Alone, the relationship I finally make, if I make one, is not impersonal and not only political: it is individual, it is personal, it is both more and less than political. Not We and They; not I and It; but I and Thou. Not political, not pragmatic, but mystical" (Guin 2017, p. 259).

Genly Ai also emphasizes that the confederation repeatedly risks that such new and 'mystical' beginnings characterized by a dialogical and personal ethics can go terribly wrong because of particularly power struggles. But he seems to imply that the confederation accepts such a risk given that the custom continues. Genly Ai has also chosen willingly to become an envoy and does seem

to follow this kind of ethics in his openness and patience with the differences and recurrent disagreement that he faces. But, perhaps contrary to other envoys, he must also confront powers that are beyond his control, which amongst other things results in the loss of his rescuer, Estraven, with whom he comes to develop a loving and equal relationship. Estraven is killed by border guards when attempting to cross the border between the two nations together with Genly Ai, which can also be interpreted as a tragic result of the political conflict between the two nations that has been partly transformed into a military conflict. In a certain sense, Genly Ai 'embodies' the crucial and developing tension between such a dialogical ethics and political developments that are 17 light-years away from the confederation. Oppositely, the larger mission of a continuously expanding confederation of planets, which is pursued by sending envoys to new planets, can be said to express the idea of an expanding union that ties ethics and politics together and overcomes the before-mentioned tension through a new equality developed during these difficult encounters. In this regard, it might also seem that the larger mission aspires to bypass the role of politics by only sending solitary envoys to different planets where they are thought to develop a personal and ethical relation with the inhabitants outside of any political space. But at least from Genly Ai's presentation, it is rather the case that the ethics of aspiring to develop personal relationships, which are in themselves "not political" as quoted, is still meant to play *a supportive role* in the inevitable political conflicts and negotiations that recurrently arise through these interplanetary encounters.

But since politics and ethics do not just support each other but also repeatedly conflict throughout the novel, one might pose the question of whether there is any endpoint in sight that might resolve the evolving tension between the two. However, there is no clear answer in the novel as to whether the dialogical ethics can provide the basis for continuously resolving political issues that arise between both nations and planets, even though it does seem to be the case that the nations on the planet visited by Genly Ai will join the confederation. The novel ends on an optimistic note of peace and cooperation, but the clashes between ethics and politics still seem to repeat themselves when a larger ship from the confederation arrives at the end. After having changed profoundly during the years, Genly Ai finds himself standing now more on the planetary inhabitants' side rather than with his colleagues when the meeting between the two groups takes place. Suddenly, he comes to find the visitors' appearances disturbing – particularly the marked difference in male and female sexes that does not exist on this planet where they do not have any fixed sex – and at least one of the arriving visitors does not even recognize Genly Ai at first. The process of

attempting to interact with each other as two types of life that are quite literally *alien* to one another has, to some extent, to start all over again. Therefore, it seems that the unresolved tension of there being *a continuous oscillation* between ethics and politics being in alignment and misalignment, complementary and conflicting, persists from beginning to end. It thus remains a more open question whether the dialogical ethics and the interplanetary politics will develop each other in a complementary manner or whether they instead split apart so that the 'mystical' ethics becomes a more utopian ideal in contrast to a political reality of persistent conflict. From this perspective, the relation between ethics and politics does not necessarily acquire one stable form given that the relation continues to change and, at least sometimes, can even oscillate between being conflicting and complementary. As in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, there might not be a clear ending at all. For this reason, we can also not just characterize this relation as either continuous or discontinuous. It can only be characterized as tension-full because there are *both continuities and discontinuities*.

So, I have by now elaborated the main parts of the ontological framework for the thesis with a conceptualization of ethics, politics, and their relation to each other. In this regard, the conclusion so far is that this relation is neither fully continuous nor the opposite but rather *tension-full and in constant development* since politics and ethics are two partly different ways of being normative. This is also what is expressed by the not easily comparable metaphors of 'taming' and 'staging' normative problems, which points to partly separate modes of normativity that can both complement and conflict with one another. In this connection, Robert Bernasconi has claimed that we should be suspicious of anyone who "can tell us with confidence" what we should mean once and for all by ethics and politics (Bernasconi, 2015, p. 214). Bernasconi argues that both concepts are regularly used in various ways by theorists to advance ideological agendas that we should not simply agree to. But whether or not this is true, I have aimed to show throughout this chapter that theorists can still develop meaningful ways to conceptualize, and even slightly change, how we already conceive these two concepts more intuitively. Self-critique and considerable caution when interpreting so widespread and contested concepts such as ethics and politics are intellectual virtues. In this sense, we should beware of being unduly 'confident', as Bernasconi points to. But this is also one of the reasons why this chapter has both discussed a selection of relevant theories on the topic, conceptualized ethics and politics separately with reflections on their different connotations and ambiguities, and finally proposed a preliminary interpretation of their relation to

each other. Thus, this chapter provides *a cautious basis* for the conceptual exploration of civility as well as the development of a reconceptualization that posits civility between ethics and politics.

2. Political ethics, ethical politics

As already mentioned, this chapter focuses on how liberal and critical theoretical conceptions of civility either explicitly or implicitly relate ethics and politics together. As an analytical tool, I am going to characterize conceptions where a form of ethics is thought to regulate a political space and its conflictual character as 'political ethics'. Even though it is difficult to neatly categorize all conceptions in this manner, an analytical distinction can be made between political ethics and what I will oppositely call an 'ethical politics'. Civility as an ethical politics implies that its moral norms are instead conceived as being developed through spaces of political conflict. In this sense, what distinguishes these two categories from each other is a question about *causality*; which of the two parts has the most influence on the other? In the different sections of the chapter, this distinction will be applied and discussed continuously as to the conceptions of civility selected for this chapter. But the aim of this chapter is not only to show how liberal and critical theoretical conceptions of civility most often fit into these analytical categories by pointing to a relation between ethics and politics in which it is *one part that predominantly influences the other part*. With a particular focus on those conceptions where it is not as clear whether they express a political ethics or an ethical politics, I also aim to show through the discussions that these two are *not the only available options* for interpreting civility. Even though this has not been developed theoretically through the conceptions that I analyze, I will thereby point to the possibility, which is explored further in the rest of the thesis, that civility can also imply a more mutual influence between ethics and politics.

In addition, it is possible to analytically distinguish between a 'weak' and a 'strong' form of both these categories for conceptualizing the relation between ethics and politics that civility can imply. A strong form implies that one part has a significant and unidirectional influence on the other, while a weak form implies that one part predominantly influences the other but also that the reverse process can occur at times. In a weak form, civility as a political ethics implies that its moral norms *predominantly* regulate politics without being contested in turn but also that they can be put into question at times. In contrast, the strong form implies an emphasis on the unconditional and perhaps 'universal' character of such norms; that they cannot, or at least should not, become contested under any circumstances. On the other side, a weak form of civility as an ethical politics implies that its moral norms are *predominantly* subject to contestation and change but also that they can and do acquire a more settled state at times. In contrast, the strong form means that these

norms constantly develop through the space of politics. Just as with the overall analytical divide, it is not all conceptions that can be classified as clearly being either a weak or a strong form, but the distinction still points to discernable differences within each of the two analytical categories.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section will focus on what it means to conceive civility as a political ethics and thereby position ethics as that which influences politics more than the other way around. To this purpose, I will primarily analyze two selected theorists, John Rawls and Lisa Mitchell, who have both conceived civility as being more established norms regulating politics. However, I will also argue that particularly as to Mitchell's conception it is difficult to say clearly what the exact relation between ethics and politics is. The second section will analyze and discuss the opposite approach of interpreting civility as a political influence on moral norms, as an ethical politics, whether this is conceived as a constant or a more discontinuous process. In this regard, I will focus on liberal conceptions that posit civility as a set of norms that arise through democratic politics, which has become an influential approach to conceiving civility as an ethical politics. I will particularly discuss Mark Kingwell's conception as a prominent example of such an approach. In addition, the question about *political inclusion and exclusion* will also be discussed because, as I will argue, this is a crucial question as to whether civility as an ethical politics both can and should be conceived in a weak or strong form. This is also a topic that critical theoretical conceptions of civility often focus on regarding how civility functions through political exclusion.

Finally, the third section will discuss different possibilities for conceiving the relation between civility and *civic virtue* since the question about whether civility should be characterized as mostly a political ethics or an ethical politics is particularly pertinent in this context. It might seem odd that Ann Mongoven's dismissal of civility as a concept in favour of civic virtue has been selected for closer analysis and discussion in this context, but I will argue that it is indeed relevant to focus on why a theorist such as Mongoven dismisses civility and separates it from civic virtue as a political ethics. Overall, these three sections show how both liberal and critical theoretical conceptions of civility imply a distinct relation between ethics and politics but that the potential dynamic of this relation is not investigated any closer. In this regard, this chapter also builds on the previous one by arguing that the difference between formal and substantial aspects connects to the relation between ethics and politics because how we conceive this relation has a clear influence on whether we interpret civility as having a more substantial meaning or a more formal character.

2.1.　　　An ethification of politics

As the previous chapter showed through the analysis of both liberal and critical theoretical conceptions, civility is often interpreted as an established set of moral norms that regulate politics without being, at least to the same degree, subject to change through political developments.[19] From this perspective, ethics is the basis that can make it possible to change the space of politics and modify political developments. This seems to be the case with otherwise very different conceptions such as Teresa Bejan's mere civility as a minimal standard of social behavior, Linda Zerilli's interpretation of civility as tied to a homogeneous public, and Slavoj Žižek's notion of civility as a spontaneous enactment of freedom. In some cases such as Žižek's Hegelian conception based on the realization of freedom, civility even seems to constitute a strong form of political ethics that cannot be questioned or changed since it is a societal order that as a 'fragile web' can easily disintegrate if it becomes unstable. But particularly from a critical theoretical perspective, civility can also be characterized as a weak form of political ethics that only appears to be unchangeable but is in fact dependent on political circumstances. It might even be a part of the effective functioning of civility that it *masks itself as a strong form of political ethics*, even though it is repeatedly changing through politics beneath the surface. In this sense, civility can possibly switch between a more settled state and shorter but recurring periods of critique and change, even though it is at times unclear whether civility for critical theorists may develop into a better form of political ethics or whether it should be discarded once-and-for-all, as it has been discussed regarding David Theo Goldberg's approach. In the following, I will further analyze and discuss two selected conceptions of civility that seem to imply a political ethics by first examining John Rawls' notion of a 'duty of civility', which at least in one version clearly constitutes a liberal form of political ethics, and thereafter Lisa Mitchell's conception that both contains a critique of liberal individualism, which partly reflects a critical theoretical approach, and must be a rather weak form of political ethics since civility on this account is dependent on recognition by political authorities.

To begin with, John Rawls' use and understanding of the concept of civility cannot be neatly classified since it changed during his authorship. As William A. Edmundson notes, Rawls

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[19] A classic example of such an interpretation is also the thoughts and practice of Mahatma Gandhi for whom civil protest or so-called 'satyagraha' was a type of individual self-sacrifice, faith, and non-violence that required one to draw and uphold a "cordon around the self". One should thereby base any engagement in politics on such *a moral relation to oneself*. As Uday S. Metha argues in his interpretation of Gandhi, this also provides an example of how demanding and potentially exclusionary civility as such a form of political ethics can become (Metha, 2013).

consistently wrote about a "duty of civility" as a moral duty for citizens engaged in politics but in two distinct ways in the essential works *A Theory of Justice* (1971) and *Political Liberalism* (1993) without giving an explicit explanation for this (Edmundson, 2002, p. 220). Neither does Rawls motivate the choice in either case of 'civility' as a concept, which is presumably because focus is put on the role that this duty of civility is meant to play within a larger theoretical framework. Since both interpretations have to do with specific requirements of citizenship, it might even be the case that another expression such as a 'duty of citizenship' could also have been chosen by Rawls. Given that the duty of civility cannot be disassociated from the far-reaching liberal theories developed in both *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism,* it is not possible to discuss in-depth the meaning and relevance of the different usages of this term applied by Rawls. His political philosophy is already a serious candidate for being the most debated political philosophy in modern times and there are also extensive discussions of the duty of civility, particularly within the framework that is introduced by Rawls in *Political Liberalism* (Boettcher, 2012; Bonotti, 2015; Thunder, 2006). Instead, I will focus on why the choice of 'civility' as a concept by Rawls *cannot be entirely accidental*, even if it is not strictly necessary, in those cases where he refers to a duty of civility since such a duty does point in various ways to a relation between ethics and politics.

The 'duty of civility' in *A Theory of Justice* imposes a moral obligation for individual citizens in a nearly just society "not to invoke the flaws of social arrangements as a too ready excuse for not complying with them, nor to exploit inevitable loopholes in the rules to advance our interests" (Rawls, 1971, p. 355). Such a duty of civility presupposes the establishment of a society that to a large extent follows those ethical principles of justice that are presented in this work, which qualifies the society to be 'nearly just'. It is *a negative duty* that restrains us from taking advantage of what Rawls perceives as the inevitable defects of institutions. In this regard, it is also connected to Rawls' notion of civil disobedience, which will be analyzed and discussed in the later chapter on civil disobedience. For now, it is worth mentioning that the duty of civility does not forbid citizens to break the law but requires them to publicly justify their disobedience with reference to instances of *clear injustice* instead of what Rawls perceives as *minor flaws*. Overall, such a duty of civility is inherently tied to Rawls's conception of justice as fairness by establishing moral limits on both egoistic deviances in a nearly just society and conflict about 'flaws' in such a society through, for instance, the practice of disobedience or noncompliance. In this sense, it can also be characterized as a strong form of political ethics since it seems to assume that the limits between

minor flaws and clear injustices can be clearly drawn and should not be political questions that can be subject to both change and contestation. In other words, the duty of civility in *A Theory of Justice* implies that *the already given standard* of justice sets moral limits on the possibility of political conflict that will almost inevitably arise if citizens do not comply with what Rawls broadly calls nearly just 'social arrangements' and justify noncompliance with reference to their flawed character. Political conflict often includes extensive disagreement about what should be classified as either minor and inevitable flaws or major and avoidable injustices. But, at least according to this duty of civility, it is not only possible to draw the line between the two but also *a moral requirement for each individual citizen* to do so in accordance with the best of his or her abilities.

As Rawls remarks in *Political Liberalism,* his earlier "moral doctrine" of justice as fairness is not distinguished from a political conception of justice (Rawls, 1993, p. xv). That is, no clear distinction is drawn between moral and political philosophy in *A Theory of Justice*, which changes after his so-called 'political turn' when he begins to emphasize the distinct character of a liberalism that is politically oriented. More in line with the conception of politics proposed in this thesis, Rawls does not just connect the political element of 'political liberalism' with society as such but also with a pluralism of doctrines and lifeforms, which profoundly divides citizens. To Rawls, the subject matter of political liberalism is the question: "How is a just and free society possible under conditions of deep doctrinal conflict with no prospect of resolution?" (p. xviii). In this context, the duty of civility also imposes a moral obligation as its earlier version, but this time it is a duty for citizens to be able to explain to each other their fundamental principles for the policies they advocate as well as to be willing to listen. According to Rawls, this implies an established standard of 'public reason' and, thus, a differentiation between 'reasonable' and 'unreasonable' doctrines, which is perhaps the most controversial part of Rawls' political liberalism. But regardless, such a duty of civility constitutes instead a form of ethical politics since it arises out of a context with 'deep doctrinal conflict', even though this might be a weak form of ethical politics since it seems that such a duty of civility is also a standard that should not be questioned once it is established.[20] Thus, this duty of civility only arises as *a consequence of political conflict*; it is a 'child of politics'.

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[20] In some interpretations of Rawls, the division of doctrines into reasonable and reasonable ones is historically contingent and thus also changeable (Bonotti, 2015, p. 194). However, what does not seem changeable is the basic principle, once it is established, that it is both possible and desirable at any given time to make such a distinction.

It is more difficult to categorize Lisa Mitchell's conception of civility as either a political ethics or an ethical politics. In contrast to Rawls' focus on individual citizens, Mitchell criticizes such *an individualist starting point* for conceiving civility that seems to be particularly common in liberal approaches. According to Mitchell, civility is not just about the conduct of individual citizens who can be both conceived and encouraged to act as the primary actors of their political community. As she argues, such a link between the concept of civility and individualism is evident in liberal approaches to deliberative democracy where civility is also thought to play an important role in the facilitation of dialogue between citizens (Mitchell, 2018). Whether one stresses a willingness to listen, a commitment to compromise, or good manners, civility is thereby conceptualized as an individual form of conduct and not as also existing *between and outside of individuals*. Since individuals are 'autonomous' actors, civility is preferably established before deliberation actually occurs as what Colin Farrelly describes as a "prerequisite" for democratic practices in a pluralist society (Farrelly, 2007, p. 206). According to Mitchell, civility is thus posited exclusively 'within' individuals as a set of skills and qualities that the citizens ought to express in a controlled manner.

Mitchell claims that such an approach not only tends to ignore the social context that creates and frames this kind of civility in the first place but might furthermore make us forget that civility and incivility can also characterize *collective action*. As a paradigmatic example, she discusses the southern Indian practice of large collective assemblies on the streets known as 'jana garjanalu', which literally means "roars of the people" since these assemblies are thought collectively to express a political message to the authorities – "an effort to gain recognition and voice", as Mitchell writes (Mitchell, 2018, p. 229). This means that hundreds of thousands and sometimes even millions of people gather together. Such practice is widespread in Telangana, which became a separate regional state in 2014 after years of collective actions by residents in the more economically marginalized Telugu-speaking regions inside of Telangana. Mitchell's interpretation is that the partial success so far with the creation and recognition of this regional state has to do with the fact that the collective actions did not brand the wealthier and politically more influential migrants in the area as adversaries but simply focused on *equal recognition*. In this sense, which implicitly links civility to inclusion and equality, the collective 'bodies' on the streets acted civilly. Civility as this type of political ethics means that collective actors ought to practice inclusion as an integral part of not only what they strive for in society but also *how they constitute themselves*.

Furthermore, Mitchell stresses that we do not need to claim that these collectives are, somehow, 'autonomous' in a similar way as we most often do with individual citizens. They also depend on broader contexts and develop in relation to recognition, or a lack thereof, by the authorities of a given political community. Therefore, she argues against interpreting civility as a cause or foundation on its own and instead applies the concept to characterize a societal condition created by the "existence of a responsive state" and "structures of authority" in which collective action evolves by recognition of collectives as political subjects (p. 223; p. 239). But on this account, civility becomes also, at least partly, an appearance of political legitimacy dependent on those currently in power and not necessarily *a truly inclusive way* of practicing collective action given that a 'responsive state' may also recognize less inclusive actors as legitimate and thereby civil. As Mitchell underlines, the relation between civility and collective action depends on a distribution of recognition that provides those recognized as having a political voice "the luxury of *appearing* to be more civil*", while those ignored and unrecognized must turn to uncivil efforts to be heard.

In this regard, it is not entirely clear what 'appearing to be more civil' means. Does it entail that there are types of collective action which falsely appear to be civil, while other types of action are truly civil in a similar way as it was possible to distinguish between a 'true' and a 'false' civility in the analysis of Slavoj Žižek's conception? Or from the opposite perspective, are *shifting appearances* perhaps all there is to civility and its dependence on shifting power relations? The answers to these questions must determine whether this conception should be conceived as either a political ethics, as it seems to be, or rather a form of ethical politics, unless Mitchell would argue that her conception implies a mutual influence that does not fit into this distinction. At least one way of interpreting Mitchell's claim that civility is a "product" of, rather than a "pre-condition" for, democracy is to conceive civility as dependent on *a political opportunity structure* that provides the necessary conditions for recognition in the first place. If political subjects can appear as civil to structures of authority, this means that they are recognized by these authorities. In this sense, appearance is an integral part of civility if it implies recognition because one must *appear as recognizable* to be recognized. But as Mitchell also claims from a more critical perspective, the value of civility is thus dependent on the inclusiveness of such recognition from the authorities. Perhaps inevitably, civility makes some recognizable as legitimate actors in a political arena and others as illegitimate actors, if they appear at all for those who authoritatively make this distinction.

Overall, it is difficult to maintain an interpretation of civility as a political ethics that establishes a stable normative setting for politics if civility itself as an ethics for collective action in such a conception is also constituted by political developments. As Mitchell argues, it is important to note that civility can exist on intersecting levels of individual and collective action. But the question that is relevant in this context is what its role is in the *just as complex intersection* between moral norms and political conflict. Mitchell does not directly address this question except that she interprets civility as also being dependent on the recognition offered by political authorities. Given that such recognition can also be contested in Mitchell's conception, such a notion of civility might also express the opposite of a political ethics – namely, an ethical politics in which the moral norms of civility continuously develop through political conflict. If even what we otherwise perceive as basic ethical principles such as inclusion and recognition are, in practice, dependent in both their meaning and significance on political actors, civility becomes at least *a quite weak form of political ethics veering toward an ethical politics*. In this sense, unless civility relies on a clearly established normative framework such as Rawls' 'moral doctrine' of justice a conception of civility as also being dependent on political circumstances implies a rather weak form of political ethics if not an ethical politics. With this in mind, we will in the following section focus on conceptions that emphasize the political setting rather than an already established ethics; a setting that is often characterized as 'democratic'. In this way, politics sets the stage for ethics more than ethics influencing politics. First, I will focus on Mark Kingwell's theory of civil politics as representative of this approach and thereafter I will discuss the issue of inclusion and exclusion from a political community as perhaps the most important question for how civility as an ethical politics is constituted and whether it has a weak or strong form. In this regard, I will also show that the discussed theorists in the forthcoming section do not consider the possibility of a continuous development of civility between ethics and politics, which goes beyond a notion of ethical politics.

2.2.   A more democratic civility?

Conceiving civility as an ethical politics still means that civility has a moral status but, contrary to political ethics, it is now ethics itself that is tied to and modified by a political setting. Thus, an ethical politics relates its moral norms and standards to *a prior setting of politics*. But again, numerous versions abound depending on different values and ideals connected to political practices such as citizen engagement. For instance, Benjamin Barber conceives civility as an

important part of a so-called 'strong democracy', in which it covers an indefinite array of skills and qualities that the entire citizenry ought to practice such as deliberation, inclusiveness, and imagination (Barber, 1999, pp. 42-45). As Barber, both liberal and republican thinkers often argue that civility requires not only dialogue and participation but also the spread of an extensive set of common norms or what some even characterize as a so-called 'civil religion' that can bind the citizenry together and *facilitate engagement in politics* (Daly, 2015). This is also an idea that is at times said not to be contained in the liberal usage of the concept of civility (Boyd, 2006, p. 868). But what connects these different approaches is that they associate civility with a facilitation of political engagement through *a common political space* that citizens share and depend upon – whether or not such a facilitation can also be realized in various forms and degrees depending on the contingent character that each political community assumes (Barber, 1984; Pippin, 2005).[21] In some conceptions, such a common 'ethos' can also be interpreted as a form of political ethics if civility is thus conceived as another way for ethics to regulate politics. However, if civility is conceived as contingent upon a historical community and *its development through political contestation*, it belongs rather to the type of conceptions that can be classified as ethical politics.

However, such conceptions of civility in relation to, for instance, a 'strong democracy' must also require a focus on the background conditions that such practices of civility require. That is, what is it that creates and upholds or, at least, does not hinder the emergence of civility and its political role? As Benjamin Barber points out, it might seem a bit odd to pose such questions because we often interpret civility as a practice that, so to speak, grounds and reinforces itself through its crucial role in society. But it is also clear that civility *does not arise out of nothing* but depends on prior practices and institutions that we may associate with a 'civil society'. Politics as an organized space of conflict must itself be developed for it to establish civility. In this connection, Barber is pessimistic about the possibility of bringing about more civility. He even proposes that we are stuck in *a vicious circle* by lacking the basis for promoting civility: "The coming of civility awaits the revitalization of civil society, which awaits the coming of civility" (Barber, 1999, p. 47). Such a vicious circle can also apply to civic virtue, which we will focus on in the next section, since it

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[21] Often theorists assume that civility *only* belongs in democracies or simply is the "etiquette of democracy", as Stephen Carter claims, because of the associations of civility with pluralism, deliberation, and political participation (Carter, 1998). But because of this, there also seems to lack a general philosophical discussion about the role of civility in connection to other forms of government or, to put it in broader terms, wholly different types of political community.

is said to depend on socialization from an early age which must require that those in charge of such socialization – parents, siblings, teachers, and so on. – can, at least to some degree, exemplify civic virtue. In this sense, both civility and civic virtue necessarily depend on *a supportive societal basis*.

But how we conceive such a 'coming of civility' is thereby also related to our reflections upon what civility implies, which is why the context must be conceived as part of the matter itself. If civility is a set of norms that can only exist in a particular kind of society, understanding what society civility belongs to must also be a part of understanding civility itself. In this regard, Barber's own definition of civility as "an other-regarding, undogmatic tolerance in confronting the political conflict that is essential to democracy" is particularly interesting because it claims that civility belongs to the type of society that democratically 'confronts' political conflict (p. 40). To Barber, civility is practiced and maintained continually by an engaged citizenry within a strong democracy. Such a democracy is said to go beyond liberal democracy because all citizens actively participate in aspects of self-government in one way or another, which must require everyone to be civil. As with the previously discussed conceptions that propose different forms of political ethics, it is possible to question whether what it means to be 'other-regarding' and 'tolerant' is not also subject to political conflict. It seems at least unrealistic that they can simply be posited as established standards which we can rely upon as starting points when citizens engage in democratic politics. But for our purposes, Barber still makes the important point that an account of civility as an ethical politics implies a focus on *the political setting that civility is posited within*. The rest of this section will further discuss the possibilities for conceiving such a setting of civility with a focus on Mark Kingwell's interpretation of civility and its role in a liberal democracy. Kingwell's conception is particularly relevant to focus on since it constitutes a form of ethical politics that arises out of a pluralist setting but also veers toward a political ethics that regulates politics without being challenged in return. Kingwell's conception is thus interesting to discuss in this context because it not only provides a typical example of civility as a liberal form of ethical politics, like Rawls' duty of civility in *Political Liberalism*, but also potentially exceeds the distinction between civility as ethical political or political ethics, even though Kingwell is not entirely clear about this.

Briefly put, Mark Kingwell conceives civility as a form of communication that arises out of disagreement between citizens with the aim of facilitating this disagreement. To Kingwell, this means that civility belongs to a continuum with politeness as its more mundane and not quite so

political counterpart. That is, both are *conversational practices* that include different abilities such as self-restraint, tact, and sensitivity, which overall "contributes to smooth social interaction" and thus also facilitates political conflicts and disagreement (Kingwell, 1995, p. 219). Kingwell stresses that a significant part of being civil is that you do not say everything at once but refrain from speaking in different situations. In other words, it demands of us what he calls a "sincere insincerity". According to Kingwell, it is exactly because of our sincere commitment to common understanding or, at least, out of sensitivity to tense situations that we do not always say all the true or "morally excellent things" which we could say with the purpose of letting others speak as well. Even when we are completely right, we do not insist on repeating it all the time to others. Kingwell turns in this regard to Arthur Schopenhauer's famous parable about porcupines that are huddled together on a cold winter day but still need to keep a certain distance because of their quills with which they inadvertently prick and sting each other (pp. 224-225). In this sense, civility cannot eliminate the ways that we 'sting' each other within politics but it can *mitigate the harm*.

In this connection, Kingwell's conception of civility also stands out as both liberal and pluralist because it posits civil discourse as the basis of common understanding and meaningful social interaction in a pluralist setting with competing visions and pursuits of the good life. Like many other liberal theorists, Kingwell argues that self-restraint and tact in public conversation are necessary to avoid that disagreement and irreconcilable differences evolve into violence. However, Kingwell is more ambitious on civility's behalf since he claims as well that civility facilitates a vibrant political dialogue that is itself *essential to a just society*. To Kingwell, civility *is* justice because it sets the social conditions for how we can negotiate differences in ethical commitments. Civility orients us towards commonality while recognizing possibly irreconcilable differences. Kingwell's claim is thus that citizens who ascribe to civility as a liberal virtue do not simply, pace Bejan, "share pragmatic goals of living together" but also "aspire to sharing the deeper goals of living together well – that is, justly" in open and respectful dialogue with each other (p. 43). 'Living together well' means, for Kingwell, also to be engaged in political conflict through civil conduct.

In this sense, Kingwell conceives civility as a form of morality that has developed and become important through the repeated emergence of conflict in modern society. However, Kingwell still seems to assume that there are certain limits to conflict in the sense that politics mainly takes place between *external actors*, whether they are individuals or collectives. He does contend that societies

evolve and that we continuously change each other even profoundly through interaction. But, nevertheless, the starting point is that we possess a moral vision of perfection and a distinct idea of the good that we intend to pursue when we engage in political conflict. Hence, the possibility that conflict might also exist *within each of us* as both individual and collective actors is not truly considered. A curious thought experiment that Kingwell uses to compare civility with politeness is a proposed dilemma about whether we should tell a friend that the person is "wearing an ugly, ill-fitting suit" to a dinner party (p. 218). In this case, it is clear to Kingwell that the only both polite and civil thing to do is to restrain ourselves, even if we possess a justified opinion that the suit is hideous. But what does not seem to be required by Kingwell is that we may also have to practice self-restraint toward our own judgments in the sense of being open to the self-reflection that arises when we, for instance, ask ourselves: Am I certain that this is an ill-fitting suit? And might the person be interested in hearing my opinion? In this sense, the self-restraint that Kingwell interprets as civility seems to be *a limited and outward-looking form of ethical politics* that also veers toward a political ethics since it is not clear to which degree such practices are developed through politics. If they belong to a continuum with politeness as their apolitical counterpart, what is it exactly that makes them *political in character*? Intuitively, it seems at least that tact and self-restraint are just as valuable types of behavior within more apolitical settings such as family life.

Oppositely, if we include self-critique and self-reflection in how civility functions and develops it must become easier to present a clear conception of civility as an ethical politics. This also distinguishes the concept from politeness, etiquette, and other concepts for 'social lubrication'. In other words, this means that civility can imply what we might call *a partial 'non-identity' with oneself* in the sense that politics can also relate to and evolve conflicts, and thus internal divisions, within ourselves. With this perspective, we might even extend Kingwell's claim that civility requires self-restraint toward others to claim that it also demands an open and sincere *self-restraint toward oneself* in the sense that one furthermore allows for conflicting 'voices' or, at least, different perspectives, commitments, and values to be heard in an inner dialogue. In this admittedly counterintuitive sense, restraining oneself does not always just point outwards in the sense that we do not state right away what we 'really' think and feel but can also *point inwards* in the sense of questioning what we, at least from the start, believe is our both genuine and correct normative view. In political contexts with entrenched polarization, the primary task of every citizen might even be *to act civilly toward oneself* in this manner. Such self-restraint toward oneself must imply

that the normative problems that politics confronts is not simply a question about conflictual relations *between* individuals and collectives but also concerns *internal divisions* that may cut through the individual herself. Civility as such an ethical politics extends the development of political conflict and its influence on moral norms to the internal life of individuals and collectives.

As with other conceptions, it is difficult to neatly categorize Kingwell's liberal conception of civility as either a political ethics or an ethical politics. As a more political counterpart to politeness it only arises and exists within a certain political setting and, yet, it implies a sincere commitment to mutual understanding as well as tact and sensitivity that can be thought of as valuable qualities independently of any particular politics.[22] In this sense, Kingwell's conception also constitutes an example of the grey zone that seems to exist with some both liberal and critical theoretical conceptions not clearly fitting into one of these analytical categories. As in everyday usage, the ethical and political associations of civility are often bundled together in theoretical accounts. But the question that remains to be explored for those conceptions that might go beyond this distinction and point toward a more mutual and dynamic relation between ethics and politics is: How is it that ethics and politics seems to *both come together and disrupt one another* through civility? Conceiving a political setting as an integral part of civility, as Kingwell does, implies an intertwinement between ethics and politics, but it does not by itself imply a focus on whether civility also *evolves in between the two* when, for instance, someone questions her own values.

There is also another central issue that Kingwell does not focus on, but which seems to be unavoidable for the theoretical development of civility as an ethical politics. This is the issue of how civility relates to both inclusion and exclusion within a political community or, at the very least, the space that politics develops within. That is, given that civility can be conceived as an 'ethos' developed through the space of politics how do we make a demarcation between a civil sphere and whatever, or whomever, is located outside? In addition, should a demarcation even be made, or is it possible to uphold a *more open civility*? A more open civility can be interpreted as a strong form of ethical politics in which even the outer boundaries of civility are contestable, while a *more closed civility* would rather qualify as a weak form of ethical politics. Either way, these

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[22] Kingwell also characterizes civility as a 'civic virtue' that is applicable in countless everyday situations where conversational self-restraint may be required. But it is nevertheless prescribed a particular political role to play: "Civility is indeed a basic civic virtue, but one primarily focused on political conversation" (Kingwell, 1995, p. 26).

questions about the boundaries of politics go further than the issue about 'internal exclusion' raised by critical theorists because they are about exclusion as such. It is also important to note that it might not only be individuals or groups but can also be practices and conversational subjects that are excluded from the political community. For example, Teresa Bejan and Bryan Garsten interpret the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes so that a civil state in the Hobbesian conception bans any disagreement and controversy between its citizens simply because the mere act of expressing disagreement can be perceived as offensive (Bejan & Garsten, 2014, p. 28). For Hobbes, 'civil disagreement', as it is often called today, would be *a contradiction in terms* because disagreement by itself gives rise to people's pride and therefore necessarily brings about hatred and violence. On this account, it is not so much people as it is the expression of disagreement that is excluded.

Simone Chambers and Jeffrey Kopstein have made a relevant distinction in this regard between what they call a "particularist civility", on one hand, and a "more democratic civility" on the other. While the former is defined as 'particularist' in the sense of restricted to specific members of a group, the latter is characterized as extending political inclusion through, for instance, trust and public recognition to "all citizens regardless of group membership" (Kopstein & Chambers, 2001, p. 841). The question is, however, whether the citizenry even in a democracy is not just one more particular group. To some extent, a 'more democratic civility' within a bounded community must also be a form of particularist civility since there are still some mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that demarcate its boundaries. It is probably not by accident that Chambers and Kopstein added the adjective 'more' as a descriptive marker since the openness that we associate with being democratic is seemingly always a matter of degrees. However, in that case we should consistently also write about a more particularist civility since the distinction must refer to *two tendencies within civility*, neither of which we can entirely avoid, rather than two separate kinds of civility. That is, it seems just as implausible that an isolated form of civility could exist within a society having no interaction with the outside world as the opposite extreme of unconditional inclusion.

Yet, we can conceive civility as being in some circumstances *almost entirely open or closed*. The most striking examples concern undocumented persons because they lack not just a legal status of citizenship but also a residence permit where they currently live. Globally, millions of these people participate in, and identify with, their communities and thus engage themselves in ways that many would characterize as active citizenship. But, as Leti Volpp underlines in her critical theoretical

analysis of illegal immigrants in the US, if we take legal status as a minimal requirement of citizenship and therefore of civility *the very presence of an illegal must also be uncivil* (Volpp, 2014, p. 88). Nonetheless, there does not seem to exist an unbreakable link between our ideas of civility, citizenship, and legal status, which the contemporary discussions about a presumed global civil society and global citizenship without legal ramifications also indicate (Keane, 2010).[23] In this sense, there rather exists a constant tension between the moral norm of inclusion, which civility to some extent implies, and the many exclusions of the political space that civility also refers to.

In this connection, Volpp discusses the DREAMer movement of undocumented youth in the US that in 2010 launched a campaign of what they called "coming out of the shadows", which encouraged other undocumented immigrants to speak openly about their situation and stories. The campaign was explicitly inspired by the LGBTQ+ community as well as the related expression of coming out of the closet and in this way "replacing fear with courage", as a DREAM activist website describes it (Volpp, 2014, p. 92). 'Coming out of the shadows' testifies to the idea of a similar performative act that might change the coordinates of the political situation in which they are mapped as uncivil intruders. But the risk is that after showing oneself in the light of day law enforcement and brute force might arrive upon the scene. In this sense, 'outsiders' such as the DREAMers seem to be *acting dangerously on the borders of a more closed civility*, but they can change the standards of inclusion and exclusion that civility relies upon through their interventions. Even if it is conceived as inherently connected to citizenship, civility can be both an assignment of a certain status related to the rights and duties of citizenship as well as the performance of activities that can alter someone's status in society. In this sense, even if civility as an ethical politics implies certain boundaries demarcating the political space, these boundaries can still be thought of as changeable *from both inside and outside* through the continuous practice of civility.

Overall, conceptions of civility that point toward an ethical politics face several challenges in theorizing how political conflict transforms moral norms as well as which kinds of inclusion and exclusion that civility implies. Once again, this calls for attention to the possibility of a more dynamic relation between ethics and politics. In this connection, the following and last section in

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[23] As early as 1981, Richard McKeon postulated the emergence of a nascent "world civility" developing through relations between individuals, associations, and societies – for instance, through world congresses in the field of philosophy, which he saw as a clear example of a so-called 'agent of civilization' (McKeon, 1981, pp. 428-429).

this chapter will focus on different possibilities for relating civility and civic virtue to each other, in which I will also show that civility cannot easily be conceived as a stable moral basis for politics. Civic virtue is often conceived as such a moral basis, but it is noticeable that civility and civic virtue can also be distinguished from each other by interpreting civility as being *more political than civic virtue.* In this connection, the relation between civility and civic virtue might also challenge the distinction between political ethics and ethical politics because civility can be interpreted both as nearly synonymous to civic virtue as a moral basis for politics and yet also, in a seemingly paradoxical way, as a persistent challenge to the establishment of such a moral basis. I will discuss what relevance and significance this has for the relation between ethics and politics that civility implies with Ann Mongoven's theory of civic virtue as the main point of reference.

2.3.   A shadow of contingency

In liberal and particularly republican thought, civility is often associated with civic virtue as an ethics providing politics with stability and legitimacy, even though not everyone equates civic virtue with civility and the formality that is associated with the concept. For instance, Philip Pettit – who is not entirely clear on the subject but poses a close connection between civility and civic virtue[24] – claims that institutions and laws would be dead devices if they did not, at least to some extent, "win a place in the habits of people's hearts" and thus became supported by civic virtue (Pettit, 1997, p. 241). But even though civic virtue seems to combine politics and ethics, it is often the case that *virtue as such* is not theoretically conceived as being tied to a political community. As Jessica Kimpell notes, civic virtues as positive traits related to public life are often seen in the republican tradition as *political in nature* since they only emerge and evolve through political participation. But, at the same time, civic virtue can also be conceived as only a "subset of moral virtue" if virtues are not necessarily civic but may be connected to something other than a political community (Kimpell, 2015, pp. 350-351). In this regard, being virtuous in politics must somehow be related to, and perhaps influenced by, how one is virtuous in other circumstances and areas of life if civic virtue and other virtues share something more than a common name. If civic virtue as

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[24] According to M. Victoria Costa, Pettit does distinguish between civility and civic virtue in some passages of his writings where he encourages external conformity as a way of guarding civility against "temptation and weakness of will" in citizens who are not virtuous – that is, *civility may persist even when civic virtue fails* (Costa, 2009, p. 409). However, whether Pettit is contradicting himself on this topic depends on whether civility can also be understood in Pettit's framework as less a matter of what defines a person's character as a whole and more as a set of norms that citizens can only partially identify with and yet follow – see also Olof Page (2010) for a discussion on this topic.

a standard is thereby more *applied* to politics than developed through political conflict because it predominantly derives from other virtuous practices, it must also constitute a political ethics. This might be, for instance, when character traits such as trust and openness developed in a non-political setting such as, at least in many cases, family life and friendship come to play a role in politics. In this sense, such an idea about civic virtue can even be characterized as a kind of 'applied ethics' similar to business ethics and bioethics but, in this context, an ethics applied to the political field.

Civic virtue can also be conceived in other ways where it does constitute an ethical politics in the sense that the virtues in question arise and develop within the space of politics. But regardless, if civility is conceived as a civic virtue this seems to entail a clear continuity between ethics and politics because civic virtue is nearly by definition posited as *a personalized form of morality* that are to provide solutions for how we can and ought to engage in politics. Since this is at least often associated with the positive role that *already defined and acquired character traits* can play within a political space, civility as a civic virtue can easily be conceived as a political ethics. This is, for instance, the case with virtues such as empathy, respect, and tolerance that are often called for to influence politics in a certain direction but not to be changed through politics itself. Civic virtue is at times also distinguished from civility by arguing that civic virtue provides a firm moral foundation of politics, which civility as an easily 'manipulated' set of norms in politics is thought not to provide. But even if virtuous practice ought to play a role in any political context, I will argue through a discussion of Ann Mongoven's theory of civic virtue that this idea of a moral basis does not provide an account of the ways that virtues might also become politicized and thus contested, which the concept of civility can point toward. Rather, such a conception of civic virtue tends to assume an unproblematic relation between ethics and politics through *an internal distance to politics*, a retreat from what might be seen as a vicious spiral of contestation. In the following, I will discuss such an approach of putting ethics first with a focus on Ann Mongoven's dismissal of civility in favor of civic virtue and pose the question of what implications this might have for possible interpretations of the ways that ethics and politics connect to each other through civility.

What seems to unite many liberal and republican thinkers in this context is an emphasis that civility is a quite demanding task because we cannot just rely on outer customs but must also develop and uphold a politically oriented 'mindset' as an integral part of ourselves. But, as already mentioned, some advocates of civic virtue conceptualize this as being different than what civility is thought to

imply since civic virtue points to an active engagement in society, while civility can be interpreted as the opposite; a kind of normativity that is imposed from above and only creates "quiet and passive citizens", as Michael Walzer puts it (1974, p. 606). Ann Mongoven, who has developed a feminist reconceptualization of civic virtue as a loving and passionate care for all our fellow citizens, also distances civic virtue from civility. Civility implies to her *an exclusionary set of norms for public life* that, for instance, stigmatizes certain protesters as uncivil. With this critical perspective, Mongoven follows Deborah Tannen in her dismissive characterization of civility as something superficial that only constitutes a "veneer of politeness spread thin over human relations like a layer of marmalade over toast" but, at the same time, is used repeatedly to deceive and suppress certain groups. It is therefore essential to Mongoven that civic virtue conceived as a comprehensive ideal should not be conflated with this "facile notion" (Mongoven, 2009, p. 21). Even if it is not entirely clear why, it must therefore also be the case that the notion of civic virtue for Mongoven does *not* play a similar deceptive role, which civic virtue might could through a 'moralization' of politics by deflecting other issues through a focus on individuals and their virtues.

As a so-called *transformation* of how we conceive civic virtue, Mongoven proposes that we reconsider how cardinal virtues from classical antiquity such as courage, patience, and moderation as well as our understanding of these virtues as appropriate means between extremes can be practiced anew to achieve what she calls a "healthy multicultural democratic functioning" (p. 274). She also argues that we must recognize the finitude of being a citizen, which implies that no one embodies a perfect integration of civic virtue but that we can provide different civic contributions to society depending on our specific skills and habits. But this still seems to presuppose that there must be in the end, at least ideally, *one correct answer for how to live and act as citizens*, which conflicts with the persistent trouble of politics. Through the repeated references to an ideal sense of a 'healthy democracy' with fully virtuous citizens, it is therefore not surprising that Mongoven distinguishes sharply between civility and civic virtue since civility is often thought of as non-ideal; as a set of norms that are possibly praiseworthy, at least to some extent, but also flawed and entirely dependent on historical circumstances. From this perspective, when civility and civic virtue are associated with each other a certain 'shadow' of contingency also falls upon our vocabulary of civic virtues and makes them questionable. Our critical awareness of civility can thus spill over into civic virtue and make us reconsider whether civic virtue is an unquestionable ideal. Mongoven is right that civility cannot easily be thought of as a synonym for civic virtue. To

Mongoven, the reason for this is that civility implies a restrictive set of manners in public life which suppresses emotions and manipulatively labels protests by marginalized citizens as 'uncivil'. But, as the before-mentioned *shadow of contingency* points to, another reason might also be that civility implies an ongoing contestation about manners and other social norms. If civility conceived as a more non-ideal notion relates to civic virtue, the latter cannot just be an already established ethics for how to engage in politics but becomes a contested issue as well, which must be contingent on ethico-political developments. This does not entail that ideas and standards of civic virtue necessarily ought to be contested but from a critical theoretical perspective it is at least suspicious if it is claimed that such standards cannot be questioned and possibly revised. In this sense, civility raises the question whether civic virtue needs to be a strong form of political ethics.

Mongoven does emphasize that her own elaboration of a 'transformed civic virtue' constitutes a "pragmatic, not a perfectionist ideal" since she assumes that there are "endemic tensions" between different kinds of virtues (p. 274). This is also why she describes civic virtue as an unending discipline of deliberatively cultivating one's practice and handling the tensions that inevitably exist between, for instance, practicing both care and justice at the same time. To Mongoven, there will inevitably be some tension between being a caring and a just citizen. In this regard, Mongoven's idea of impartiality as a central feature of civic virtue is explicitly opposed to a notion of being impartial as an absolutely disinterested perspective on society. In Mongoven's own words, impartiality must be conceived as *an evolving practice*, not a standpoint. Civic virtue as a 'pragmatic ideal' is a normative standard that is deeply embedded in the everyday life of citizens.

However, it is still not clear how much space there is for politics to question such an ideal of civic virtue, even if it is constantly evolving through societal practice. To Mongoven, practice is "the disciplined, deliberate cultivation of moral virtue over time", which seems to imply an underlying notion of moral progress in which the standard to follow is set in advance (p. 220). This line of thought is also clear in her repeated use of *appropriateness* as a measure of whether something counts as civic virtue. That is, even though Mongoven discusses everything from developments in friendships and dilemmas of family relations to workplace environments and teaching sessions there is supposed to be an 'appropriate' course of action to be followed in every kind of situation. Mongoven acknowledges that what this appropriateness is in each situation can also become a political question but not the basic presumption that there is only one appropriate thing to do. From

this perspective, it is not surprising that civic virtue, to Mongoven, dissolves 'false' oppositions between especially care and justice but also partiality and impartiality since it is presumed from the start that they "must balance and inform each other in a stable reflective equilibrium" (p. 267). Politics can thus provoke a perhaps also unending discussion on what civic virtue is in concrete circumstances, but it must not challenge the idea that civic virtue constitutes *one unified ideal*.[25] As already mentioned, it is more difficult to interpret civility as such an ideal and thereby a strong form of political ethics, but civility can instead be conceived as more than just one 'appropriate' standard to follow if its moral dimension also develops together with its political counterpart.

To conclude this chapter, I have now shown how both liberal and critical theoretical conceptions of civility often fit into the two analytical categories of political ethics and ethical politics. In this sense, they do also imply some relation between ethics and politics even if it at times not clearly stated. A political ethics, which is often expressed through conceptions of civility as a liberal 'duty' or 'virtue', interprets civility as when a specific political context is influenced by certain moral practices. Oppositely, an ethical politics interprets civility as when certain moral practices are influenced by a specific political context. But it remains to be explored whether and how civility might also point to *a more mutual influence between ethics and politics*; that moral norms about, for instance, inclusion and equality can both change and be changed by the political conflicts that they are connected to through civility. In this connection, even if Mongoven's approach might not be representative of all the ways that civic virtue is theorized today, what the discussion of the relation between civic virtue and civility suggests is that civility can be both considered in alignment with, or as a synonym of, civic virtue and dismissed by others for being *too political* and conflictual. From this perspective, the concept of civility does not fit easily into either the category of a political ethics or an ethical politics, which the widely divergent interpretations of civility in this chapter have also showed. At this point so far in the thesis, I do not pretend to have provided a more promising way to conceive the relation between ethics and politics that civility implies. Instead, the aim has been to show how there seem to be two main answers to this question;

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[25] In a review of Mongoven's *Just Love: Transforming Civic Virtue* from 2009, Joan C. Tronto remarks in a similar manner that Mongoven's far-reaching analogy between scientific communities' search for truth, Christian communities' interpretation of God's love, and the discussion on matters of right and wrong within political communities may be faulty. To Mongoven, these communities can all benefit by turning away from an unreachable ideal and being oriented towards shared practices and purposes. But as Tronto objects, a political community is not just like any other community since "it is more difficult to presume a commonality of purpose within the political community. Politics is always, on some level, about unequal power and conflict" (Tronto, 2010, p. 663).

one that 'ethicizes' civility by deriving what politics is and should be from a separate moral framework and one that 'politicizes' civility by deriving an ethics from a political framework of, for instance, liberal democracy. My point so far is that both answers lack a focus on how the relation between ethics and politics as two modes of normativity might *develop through civility*.

As I will argue in the second part of the thesis, I believe that internal conflict and reflection can provide an interpretation key to the continuous development of civility. But, before then, the following two chapters will show how these different aspects of what civility can imply so far are also reflected in other theoretical interpretations of concepts that describe something as civil – and how a more explicit and reflective approach to what we mean by designating various things as civil can become fruitful. Additionally, the next two chapters are also relevant to show that a conceptual exploration into civility can furthermore provide insights into various parts of contemporary society. In the following, I will therefore argue that when most theorists characterize what, first, the civil in civil society and, second, the civil in civil disobedience imply they also touch upon both formal and substantial aspects as well as some relation between ethics and politics. In this connection, I will also focus on particularly liberal and critical theoretical approaches. As I will show, it is possible to conduct the same type of conceptual analysis of such characterizations of what being civil means in different contexts as I have already done during the first two chapters.

3. The civil in civil society

Can we be *forced* to act civilly? Whether this relates to conceptions of civil society or not, it is an important question if coercion should or even can play a role in the realization of civility (Boyd, 2006, p. 868). As discussed in the previous chapter, civility is often conceived as a set of norms that are more 'closed' than 'open' and thereby also contain certain mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. But most conceptions still imply that civility requires *an active component*; a certain engagement and attitude that might diminish or even vanish if external control of our behavior and perhaps even our inner life begins to fill the entire picture. As a middle way between these two poles, one where civility implies sharp sanctions and another where it might be 'sanction-free', some characterize civility as not involving harsh sanctions but *only softer means* (Pippin, 2005, pp. 236-237). This approach also corresponds to the still widespread idea of civil society that it specifies a sociological category of its own which is often characterized as "extralegal" or "translegal" (Hill, 2013, p. x) – whether we describe civil society as a more limited entity or as a diffused sphere that can exist in many places and areas (Boyd, 2004, p. 603). For example, Ayhan Akman conceives civil society as a domain in which social actors engage in "non-repressive engagement with others in political and cultural contestation", whereby they both enforce and actively self-impose certain limits in order to interact peacefully and responsibly toward each other (Akman, 2012, p. 334). However, as it will be argued throughout this chapter, it also seems that these limits and how we ought to enforce them can themselves become subject to contestation.

In this chapter, I aim to show three things. First, I will show that conceptions of civil society often imply a relation between ethics and politics through a combination of certain moral norms such as non-violence and a political separation between different societal spheres. Second, I will demonstrate through a critical discussion of whether the public/private distinction provides a substantial meaning to what a civil society is that there also seems to be both formal and substantial aspects to the concept of civil society. And third, throughout the whole chapter I will point to the possibility that the civil in civil society can be conceived as a more dynamic relation between ethics and politics, even though this has not been developed by any of the discussed theorists. The following chapter does not aim to show that civil society as an influential notion is necessarily linked to the concept of civility, which might be a more open question. Therefore, I will only discuss those theorists who do focus on interpreting what *the civil part of a civil society* implies.

In the first section of this chapter, I will begin by discussing the widespread idea that civil society implies both a political separation of society into different spheres and a particular form of ethics appropriate for the sphere designated as civil. Such an idea is often coupled with liberal democracy, and most conceptions of civil society are also proposed from a more liberal perspective that emphasizes, for instance, freedom of association and individual rights. In this regard, it will be argued that these conceptions imply some relation between politics and ethics, even though it is often not clear how ethics and politics influence each other through a civil society. For this purpose, I will particularly analyze and discuss the influential notion of civil society that has been presented by John Keane since it clearly displays a conceptual gap between ethics and politics. In the first section of the chapter, I will thus focus on the *ethico-political* meaning and implications of both civil society as well as its lesser-known counterpart 'uncivil society' as these are conceived by John Keane and others. In the second section, I will thereafter shift focus to the question of whether civil society should be conceived as having only one substantial meaning or whether it also has a formal character in the sense that there is an *irreducible plurality* of various forms of civil society. At the center of this discussion is the perhaps most prominent answer today as to what such a substantial meaning of civil society might be: A distinction between a private and a public sphere.

3.1. A signifier of plurality?

Given the range of different interpretations of this concept, 'civil society' can be thought of as not so much an answer as *an open question* about what kind of society or part of society that should be considered civil. For example, can a market economy facilitate civility and thus count as being part of a civil society? And is the state's use of violence necessarily uncivil and thereby outside of any civil society? Today civil society is often thought of as an ideal-typical category which refers to *a self-organizing sphere* that is separated from territorial state institutions, even though it is simultaneously regulated by these very same institutions (Keane, 1998, pp. 6-7). But the various approaches as to whether we should exclude particularly the economy from this sphere also testify to the difficulties of defining exactly what the civil part of civil society is. As John Keane points out, the conceptual 'divorce' of the economy from a common understanding of civil society in recent history can be explained by the development of an idea that civil society constitutes a realm of *freedom and active engagement*, which stands in contrast to the perceived 'realm of necessity' that forces us to participate in the organization of the material conditions of life (p. 17). The

exclusion of the state from the concept of civil society is also a modern idea that coincides with the rise of nation-states since a "societas civilis" was not always defined as being separate from governmental bodies – quite the opposite, it could also refer to a broader societal order necessarily governed by law and government such as in the ideal of "la vita civile" that arose in the cities of fourteenth and fifteenth century Italy (Becker, 1988, pp. xv-xvii). This conceptual understanding has, at least partly, survived to this day in the various usages of 'civil' as an adjective that relates to the internal affairs of a state such as civil law, civil rights, civil service, and civil engineering.

With the before-mentioned difficulties in mind, we might choose, as Richard Boyd does, to develop an account of civil society as what he calls a "moral geography", which simply states that civil society is composed of all those "associations that promote the virtue of civility" (Boyd, 2018, p. 116). In this sense, the moral standard of civility is set in advance, and it is only a question of figuring out how to realize it. But such an idea can easily postpone the more political issues of when, where, and how such associations emerge and develop.[26] In the least, it leaves open a range of radically different analyses of society; all the way from a view that civility can be promoted by every kind of institution in contemporary society to a critique that civility cannot exist anywhere in the present institutional conditions. In relation to this, it does not address the critique raised by critical theorists such as Ellen Meiksins Wood that the idea of civil society cannot be disconnected from capitalist societies that, according to them, do not constitute a realm of freedom. From this perspective, which in Wood's case is explicitly Marxist, 'civil society' must be replaced with, for instance, 'communism' pointing to *an actual realm of freedom* (Wood, 1990). The problem with such an idea of civil society as a 'moral geography' is thereby that it seems to constitute a strong form of political ethics because the civil in civil society is not thought of as also being subject to political conflict; it is only a matter of realizing civility through political, or at least societal, means. But, at least according to many critical theorists, one cannot refer to a separation between societal spheres without this also being a political question. As, for instance, Ajay Gudavarthy has argued in the context of Indian politics, the separation of society into different societal spheres that the

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[26] Such a notion of civil society as *a moral geography* must also imply that it is 'geographically' localized at some places and not in others, even though there can be both more fixed and more fluid geographies. Boyd does provide a more specific characterization of civil society as those contexts where "persons interact who are more than perfect strangers but less than friends or kin" since civility is characterized by Boyd as a quality of social interaction *in between formal and intimate relationships* (Boyd, 2018, p. 123). At the same time, Boyd also warns against equating civil society with specific geographical localities due to a critical awareness that such contexts repeatedly change.

notion of civil society most often implies is exactly the result of political struggles. In this regard, the idea of civil society can also reflect a contemporary state of domination through an ideological discourse that delegitimizes calls for radical change within particularly the state and the market economy by framing civil society as a secluded 'realm of freedom' that we should remain satisfied with. If such a discourse becomes dominant while it is disconnected from the reality of domination that can pervade even allegedly 'voluntary' associations within, for instance, an Indian context it does makes sense to advocate what Gudavarthy calls a "post-civil society" (Gudavarthy, 2013). From such a critical theoretical perspective, civil society points to an ethical politics where moral norms about, for instance, the value of engaging in voluntary associations and meeting other citizens only arise and spread because of a political situation that both can and should change.

In this connection, John Keane argues that it has become clear that civil society in an institutional sense also produces its own ethical antithesis because "all known forms of civil society are plagued by endogenous sources of incivility" in the form of recurring instances of violent incidences such as riots, assaults, and homicides (Keane, 1998, p. 135). According to Keane, civil society points to *both civility and incivility*, which is a conception that can be characterized as more attentive to societal complexity than Boyd's notion of civil society as a 'moral geography' since it is also open to the possibility that, at least in some cases, a civil society can partly contain uncivil practices. Keane even claims that a civil society can paradoxically also be an uncivil society, which is not an inconsistency of his thought but rather a theoretical outcome of what Keane himself describes as a "post-foundationalist understanding" of civil society. That is, Keane claims that civil society as a so-called 'signifier of plurality' contains different and sometimes even contradictory meanings. However, it is mainly two different meanings employed by Keane that give rise to the possibility of something being *both a civil and an uncivil society*. On the one hand, Keane emphasizes an analytical distinction between civil society and the state, in which this institutional separation is conceived as what Keane himself describes as the very "transcendental-logical condition of democracy" (p. 64). To Keane, democracy cannot 'logically' exist without such an institutional separation between civil society and the state. But, on the other hand, Keane also distinguishes between civil society and violence, whereby the civil element implies a clear political ethics based on non-violence, in which violence is simply understood as "unwanted physical interference by groups and/or individuals with the bodies of others" (p. 138). In this sense, civil society should be organized so that such 'unwanted inference' becomes unacceptable and reduced to a minimum.

It is this duality – civil society as *both a sphere of non-violence and a sphere of institutional separation from the state* – that lets Keane dissect civil and uncivil 'societies' overlapping each other depending on the perspective he takes. Simply put, a societal sphere separate from the state is not necessarily a sphere of non-violence. Keane does not focus on the gap between these two perspectives but refers rather to a framework of *theoretical pluralism*, which provides the sense of 'post-foundationalism' that he claims there to be. However, what Keane points to is not so much that there are too but with a play on words rather 'two' many meanings, one more political and one more ethical, to provide a single foundation of what a civil society is. One of the reasons why Keane does not address this might be that Keane also refers to civil society as a more ideal-typical category, which does not fit easily with this conceptual tension. Instead, the focus is on how there seems to exist barriers constantly set in place to prevent the actualization of a "fully 'civilized' civil society" that can be conceived as *a realm of simultaneous institutional separation from the state and the spread of non-violence* (p. 135). But what is missing from this influential account is a closer exploration into the conceptual gap that arises between a societal sphere that is separate from the state and an ethics of non-violence that might only be realizable within such a sphere but whose realization is also hindered by violent practices that repeatedly occur outside of the state.[27]

Such an exploration must also include the idea of an 'uncivil society' that Keane refers to. This notion can have not only two but *three distinct meanings* based on what we conceive as the defining features of civil society. First, an uncivil society can be considered as being distinct from the state and possibly also family life and the market just as a civil society is but without exhibiting the required moral qualities of, for instance, non-violence. Second, societal spheres such as the state or family life can also be described as uncivil societies even if we grant that, for instance, a family can be just as non-violent as civil society itself. That is, families cannot be considered part of civil society if the latter is defined as a societal sphere of voluntary associations given that most families, at least those with minors, do not fit such a description. Third, an uncivil society may also lack both features by being defined as *a violent societal sphere without voluntary associations*,

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[27] In at least his later writings, Keane does consider whether some forms of modern market economy should also be included as part of civil society given that market transactions can also further non-violence and have what Keane himself calls "civilizing effects" (Keane, 2020, p. 4). Thus, Keane do reflect at least implicitly on the conceptual gap between civil society as a separation into societal spheres and civil society as an ethics of non-violence. But, as Theodore M. Lechterman has pointed out in a critique of Keane, it is possible to go even further and pose a similar question as to whether governmental institutions cannot also at times further non-violence (Lechterman, 2021).

which is the direct opposite of the ideal of a fully developed civil society that Keane refers to. In this connection, it can at least be confusing that a societal sphere might be described as a civil society on one account and at the same time an uncivil society on another. This is probably part of the reason why there are also critics of the use of such a concept of uncivil society. For instance, Clifford Bob claims that this concept should be "unceremoniously dispatched" because its use is most often both politically motivated and analytically unsound. Echoing many critical theorists' dismissal of the use of civility as a concept, Bob claims that speaking or writing about an uncivil society is more an expression of contempt for other political positions than an analytically useful concept since it, for example, seems to imply a denunciation of violence as such even in cases where it might be justified, or at least effective, to reach certain political goals (Bob, 2011, p. 217).

However, there is at the very least one sense in which the notion of uncivil society serves a theoretically meaningful purpose. This concerns the aspect of uncivil society that is implied by it *being a society* and thus also a category that goes beyond individual acts of incivility. As discussed earlier regarding Lisa Mitchell's critique of a liberal individualization of civility, the same can presumably be said about incivility. At least in its common usage, incivility also quite often refers, for instance, to individual acts of what we perceive as immoral behavior in public spaces or to an expression of a disrespectful attitude coming from a certain individual. Regardless of exactly how widespread such *individualization of incivility* might be in both common usage and theoretical accounts, the notion of uncivil society serves to underline that incivility can also emerge and develop through collective action whether this is, for instance, organized online harassment or violent mobs on the streets. For example, it makes intuitive sense to state that the mafia in a country belongs to an uncivil society that cannot be reduced to the violent activities of each member of the mafia, even if it might also be difficult to analytically delimit this to a distinct societal sphere.

As earlier mentioned, Keane also conceives civil society as an ideal and thus a category that is *irreducibly normative* and cannot easily be understood as simply a scientific tool of analysis, which is otherwise a common usage (Seligman, 1992, p. 201). The point with this is not that such analysis cannot be done or be fruitful to new insights, but that a descriptive analysis is difficult to separate from the normative commitments and associations that 'stick' to the concept as, for instance, a liberal aspiration to limit the reach of the state. At the very least, a purely descriptive notion of civil society must also capture what Simon Chambers and Jeffrey Kopstein call "bad civil society"

in the sense that a definition of civil society as, for instance, being the voluntary associational life outside of both family and state also includes hate groups, criminal gangs, and terrorist organizations (Kopstein & Chambers, 2001). In this case, it is possible to raise the question of whether the concept risks becoming both superfluous and more misleading than just writing 'voluntary associational life'. The opposite approach to all of this is to put the descriptive function aside and use civil society as a sort of *generalized shorthand* for the kind of society we all want to live in. According to Michael Edwards, there is already a certain tendency of doing so today (Edwards, 2004, p. 38). In the latter case, civil society might even turn into *a utopian notion* allowing us to imagine that all the tensions between, for instance, individual and social concerns or the public and private sphere become harmoniously dissolved. Adam Seligman compares this to Leszek Kolakowski's famous critique of the socialist utopia as a "soteriological myth" in the sense that civil society, to Seligman, has become popular as a replacement of such a myth by mirroring the idea of *an upcoming redemptive unity of social life* – but, in this case, realized more through a pluralist practice of associational life rather than class struggle (Seligman, 1992, p. 57).

As a critical response to this, it is possible to question the underlying assumption that voluntary associational life is the *preferable way* to a better society as, for instance, Mitchell Dean and Kasper Villadsen do by criticizing several contemporary theorists for being "state phobic" in their unjustified dismissal of the state as a site of emancipatory developments (Dean & Villadsen, 2012). In addition, if civil society is meant to lead by example for the rest of the more uncivil society and to ultimately effect what Keane calls a fully 'civilized' society, what is the point of enclosing it as a societal sphere through political regulation? At times, a so-called 'transmission belt' model is proposed or at least assumed, which implies a *spillover* of morally valuable practices and competencies from voluntary associations to more formal democratic politics. However, it is not surprising that such a model is repeatedly criticized since it does not by itself explain what boundaries, or lack thereof, between civil society and the state ought to be established to make such transmission function properly (Lesch & Rosenblum, 2011, p. 291). At least at first sight, the model faces a nearly paradoxical challenge: If distinct values and skills are to be developed within civil society and not the state, this must require *more firm boundaries*, but if they are to be transferred to, for instance, engagement in political matters such as running for office there needs to be *more fluid boundaries*. All of this suggests that the normative model might not be persuasive enough or, at least, also requires a supplement similar to how G. W. F. Hegel supplements his

conception of "bürgerliche Gesellchaft" – a term that is consistently, and supposedly not by accident, translated as "civil society" into English (Ilting, 1984) – with the state as a sublimating force required to develop universal and substantial freedom. Even though such a supplement does not imply a dismissal of the notion, it does mean that civil society on conceptions similar to Hegel's famous one cannot be equated with a good society as such but is rather a 'society within society'.

Thus, conceiving civil society depends on whether the concept is meant to provide us with an overall sense of what a good society is, or whether the purpose is more limited in scope. It is difficult to speak or write about civil society today without associating it with the idea that it constitutes *a certain part or aspect of society* rather than an entire type of society as a whole. In this sense, there seems to be *a built-in self-limitation* in its both descriptive and normative usage. What this part of society consists of and how it both remains distinct from and relates to other parts of society can be considered a political question, which is not merely because it implies some institutional separation between most often the state and voluntary associations but also because this division into parts can easily be negotiated and contested. As scholars often point to, the constant development of grey areas concerning, for instance, public-private partnerships or types of family life characterized by community engagement must entail that the constitution and range of civil society itself can be up for negotiation (Kocka, 2007, pp. 46-47). But civil society is just as much associated with certain moral aspects or qualities such as non-violence and freedom. This means that there must at any given moment be some moral limits to political contestation, even if these limits are also changeable. Community, civic virtue, and trust amongst strangers are clear examples of what are often considered essential constituents of the moral character of civil society. The implicit hypothesis contained within this notion seems to be that *the ethics and the politics of civil society can, at least ideally, complement each other*. Otherwise, we might as well leave the concept behind by splitting it into, for instance, a descriptive notion of voluntary associations and normative concepts of what we conceive as a good society such as democracy and non-violence.

In this regard, the seemingly unresolved problem of how to connect civil society as a political space with civil society as a 'moral geography' can also be related to an underlying question of whether civil society only points to a single substantial meaning such as non-violence or whether it also develops and differs internally through its formal character. As Keane's conception points to, what if there is *an irreducible plurality of different civil societies* that each exhibit their own

relation between politics and ethics? According to Mark Jensen, there is no common ground or shared theoretical purpose underlying the plurality of current conceptions that present each their own perspective on what a civil society implies. Jensen draws the conclusion from this that civil society is not a concept at all, at least not in a strict sense, but rather an expression associated with various concepts (Jensen, 2006, p. 27). But, without discussing what defines a 'concept' in the first place, the analysis so far still seems to point toward some common ground which is *a through-going problem* of how to connect ethics and politics when distinguishing between different parts of society. In this sense, the civil in civil society also points to some relation between ethics and politics, even if it has not been explored in-depth theoretically whether and how this relation might be dynamic. The next part of this chapter will explore whether we can encircle and characterize such a common ground even further. In this regard, it will particularly be considered and discussed whether the separation between a public and a private sphere should be designated as an integral part of any civil society, or whether it is rather one among several forms of civil society. In this sense, the guiding question is whether there only exists *one substantial meaning of civil society*.

To this purpose, I will focus on three selected theoretical approaches to both civility and civil society that are going to be analyzed and discussed. The first is Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato's influential theory of civil society, which both challenges the private/public distinction and implies a clear form of political ethics. The second is Michael J. Meyer's claim that civility can also exist in more close-knit communities such as families, which raises the question of whether we should distinguish between two types of civility within more private and more public settings. Finally, the third is Deborah Eicher-Catt's interpretation of civility as a continuous boundary-setting process between the private and the public, which also has implications for our notion of civil society. Overall, I will argue that the private/public distinction does not provide a theoretical foundation for conceiving civil society, even if we as Eicher-Catt also conceive such a distinction as being inherently unstable. Instead, civil society seems to develop through a plurality of different forms. In this regard, an underlying aim with the forthcoming section is thereby also to show that it is rather the relation between ethics and politics than, for instance, a public/private distinction that points to what the civil in civil society is 'substantially' about, and that the plurality of different forms of civil society point toward the possibility that this relation is in continuous development.

3.2.   Crossing the public and the private

What is important to note so far is that the concept of civil society usually implies both a limited societal sphere and certain ethical practices, standards, and values that characterize such a sphere. This is also the case in the various theories that posit the private/public division as a distinctive feature of what civil society is, even though their radically different perspectives are hard to reconcile with an idea that such a division constitutes a defining theoretical framework for civil society as such. One of these is the mainly liberal notion of civil society as a more private societal sphere, while another kind is the opposite model of an extensive public sphere that does not have as much room for private life. In the first case, the family and the economy tend to be included in such a sphere, while the second case revolves around the public as a notion that rather points to both voluntary associations and the state. Metaphorically, the first tends to *go all the way down* to our personal lives, while the second *goes all the way up* to larger and possibly even global settings. As I will show throughout this section, it is also not the same moral norms that are associated with civil society when it is conceived as being either a more private sphere or a more public sphere.

However, can the distinction between public and private itself provide a theoretical foundation for the concept of civil society and its different meanings if it is possible to conceive civil society as either mostly private, mostly public, or somewhere in-between? In the following, Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato's influential theory of civil society will be discussed to explore this question since this theory provides a clear example of a conception that crosses the public and the private. Overall, Cohen and Arato define civil society as an ensemble of structures and social interaction characterized by "normative integration and open-ended communication", which excludes both economic production and what they call "political society" as a different sphere defined as being about strategies and power (Cohen & Arato, 1999, p. ix). In this sense, civil society is both partly private – it includes families as "the intimate sphere" – and partly public because it also includes social movements and public debates to the extent that these are not also involved in agendas about the direct use of power. But even though such an idea of civil society as another 'realm of freedom', which is here realized through communicative practice, seems to constitute *a public sphere* in which everyone can participate, it might just as much be characterized as the opposite; *a private space* that is protected from the power struggles and controversial agendas within political society.

Cohen and Arato's approach relies primarily on the theory of communicative action as well as the distinction between system and lifeworld developed by Jürgen Habermas. Civil society is thus considered as a contemporary way of organizing the lifeworld that is put in contrast to political and economic systems defined by the 'mediums' of power and money. Given that the lifeworld on the Habermasian conception is, once again in contrast to instrumental action that defines the system, *an essentially moral concept* connected to Habermas' theory of communicative action and discourse ethics, Cohen and Arato's reliance on this notion must entail that their theory of civil society can also be interpreted as a political ethics. That is, civil society provides an institutional framework for, amongst other things, regulating political conflict through the standards of discourse ethics. In contrast to political society, the ethics of civil society is thereby meant to resolve conflicts without the influence of power relations. Discourse ethics is only the 'power' of the best argument. What is noticeable in this connection is that such a framework can also include conflicts and negotiations about *a changeable distribution between what counts as being public and private*. However, it is important to Cohen and Arato that certain fundamental rights such as freedom of speech are guaranteed to anyone so that it is possible to participate in this shared lifeworld together on equal footing. Overall, civil society is thus defined as "the institutional framework of a modern lifeworld stabilized by fundamental rights, which will include within their scope the spheres of the public and the private, this time from a lifeworld point of view" (p. 440).

In this sense, Cohen and Arato present a tripartite division of society into what they simply call civil society, political society, and economic society, but the most fundamental difference seems to be that between civil society as *a modern realization of the lifeworld* and both political society as well as economic society as systems defined by instrumental action. However, these three types of society are simultaneously characterized as "mediating spheres" that influence and overlap with each other (p. x). This is, for instance, the case with organizations such as political parties and trade unions that do not always clearly belong to either civil, political, or economic society. To Cohen and Arato, the defining question is where "the weight of coordination" lies in the sense of whether a certain organization or type of practice mainly belongs to the system or the lifeworld (p. 773). This must also be an empirical question where we should not assume in advance that the 'weight' lies clearly on one side or the other given that, for instance, international NGOs can be just as much places for open-ended communication as professional vehicles of power. But on the matter of defining civil society as such, it is clear to Cohen and Arato that without voluntary and

autonomous associations playing a prominent role there cannot be a civil society. Even if some NGOs or other actors claim to represent a form of civil society, they cannot do so if the 'weight of coordination' and thus the focus of their activities is about either gaining power or getting money.

Curiously, Cohen and Arato do not emphasize any similar distinction as the one between civil and political society regarding power within the family as a more private setting, even though a clear use of power in everyday life is arguably *parental authority*; an authority that cannot be a part of civil society if we assume that it constitutes a sort of 'state within the state'. Instead, Cohen and Arato seem to presuppose that the weight of coordination within the family as an intimate sphere is usually not found in the exercise of power but instead in communicative action that is both equal and open-ended. Indeed, Cohen and Arato characterize the family as a "core institution" of civil society (p. 724). Regardless of whether such an idea of family life might be too naive, Cohen and Arato's conception of civil society can at least incorporate even the most private parts of family life in all those cases where the members of a family are provided fundamental rights and treat each other as *equal participants in a common dialogue* about their personal lives. But given that this is sometimes not the case, such a conception of civil society does not fully encompass the private sphere that we most often associate with families and personal life. In a similar manner, it does not either fully encompass the public given that the public sphere can also refer to settings that are strictly outside of civil society on Cohen and Arato's account because these are spaces where actors such as politicians, companies, and bureaucrats exercise power and make the decisions of who gets what, when, and how; decisions that must also be of *a general concern*, which is probably the broadest characterization of what should count as being public. To be sure, civil society is public in the sense that it is a societal arena of open-ended communication, but we also slide from civil society into the arena of political society whenever power becomes exercised.

In this regard, Cohen and Arato's notion of civil society as a societal sphere whose defining characteristics include self-reflection and self-critique through open-ended communication can also include continuous debate about what should be considered as public or private. That is, the private/public distinction is not simply conceived as a fixed and constitutive feature of civil society but can *change together with civil society itself*. One illustrative example of such a continuous negotiation is the practice of particularly Muslim women wearing veils since it is often unclear in many parts of the world whether the act of veiling should be a private matter or a public

manifestation of, for example, one's faith and opinion about gender roles. As Annika Rabo formulates, veiling in at least the modern Middle East can be interpreted as a "*public* manifestation of a 'private choice'" (Rabo, 1996, p. 168). In a country such as Syria before the civil war that began in 2011, this confusion often led to political conflicts between the ruling Ba'th party with President Hafez al-Assad in charge – a politician who described veiling as a private matter that ought to be forbidden in public spaces – and young women who wore their hijab to express a public Islamic politics. It is possible to discuss whether there can even exist a civil society in countries such as Syria before the civil war because of widespread oppression and thereby a lack of, for instance, active engagement in voluntary associations. But for our purposes, the example still points to the possibility that *there might not be an ideal balance* between what belongs to the public and the private given that this is repeatedly subject to political conflict and moral change.

In relation to this, civility can also be described in some cases as a "intimacy-geopolitics" crossing the public and the private, as suggested by Alex Jeffrey, Lynn A. Staeheli, Chloé Buire and Vanja Čelebičić in their studies of meetings between young people within coffee shops in South Africa and Bosnia & Herzegovina. Such a form of civil society implies that intimate encounters become intertwined with geopolitical contestation around, for instance, questions about citizenship, community, and state formation (Staeheli, Buire, Čelebičić, & Jeffrey, 2018). Their results based on observations of the work by specific NGOs show that coffee shops can function as platforms to cultivate youth citizenship in a more private setting, even when the topics brought up by the NGOs are public issues on geopolitics that also relate to a violent past. What studies like these point to is that coffee shops can thus facilitate "intimate exchanges" between, for instance, conflicting opinions about what the state ought to do about a violent past and more private relations between people in such 'semi-public' spaces. It is well known that coffee houses have indeed played a major role in the development of public spheres in Europa and possess a history as not only spaces of sociability but also as continuous experiments in political life. Being often *neither wholly private nor completely public*, coffee shops easily lead us into grey areas of social life where civility also seems to reside. Even though we might not follow all of Cohen and Arato's theoretical approach and its reliance on a Habermasian framework, their conception can at least capture examples such as these where *what is private and what is public is not given in advance*.

Another way to question whether the public/private distinction is defining for civil society is to interpret even the most private social settings as also being spaces where civility can play a role. Michael J. Meyer has argued in this relation that not only fraternity and love but also civility is relevant to "close-knit communities" such as families and friends – and, within the context of this discussion, that a family can in a certain sense also constitute a 'civil society' on its own. That is, Meyer's argument is not that the public sphere sometimes encroaches on close-knit communities and thus creates the temporary need for a political substitute to the otherwise harmonious and personal interaction between parents and children or brothers and sisters. Rather, the point is that filial understandings and common traditions – Meyer mentions the uncertainties of what actually constitutes a friendly wager from a larger and more serious bet (Meyer, 2000, p. 82) – are often unclear in the first place. The private sphere does not necessarily constitute a harmonious whole.

Meyer distinguishes between two main forms of civility, a "civility of etiquette" and a "liberal civility", in which the first is defined as respect owed to *persons* in a morally polite society, while the second is respect owed to fellow *citizens* (p. 73). In this connection, one form is thus also more ethical while the other is more political. But in both cases, civility is associated with etiquette, courtesy, and decency which, as Meyer notes, many interpret as inadequate expressions of the 'deep' intimacy and personal concern that we often expect from each other within families. But civility and intimacy can still *complement each other* if, for example, gestures of politeness facilitate rather than hinder exchanges of truly personal concern, which Meyer claims that they can do. Meyer proposes, for instance, a notion of "brotherly civility" as a form of etiquette that is more subtle and sensitive than etiquette in public. In the case of unhappy and fragile families where personal concern with each other is in danger, civility might even be a "critical hedge against the very personal violence ... that is sometimes tragically born of failed or disrupted intimacy" (p. 81). In addition, Meyer argues that moral concern for each other in a close-knit community can be promoted and supported by not only politeness, the 'civility of etiquette', but also through *forms of respect that are more politically oriented*. That is, what Meyer calls 'liberal civility' can remind us even amid heated conflicts within close-knit communities that we ought to treat each other as equals just as we ought to do in the rest of society. This is particularly relevant for close-knit communities that are more hierarchically structured and thereby risk suppressing such a principle.

However, if civility is supposed to not just breach into our private lives from the public sphere but also emerge and change from within our most personal experiences and practices, the question is how we can negotiate and evaluate these civil norms without the space of politics that is at least established in more public settings? As Meyer himself indicates, a 'civil society' of the family is not necessarily more stable or peaceful than a civil society that mainly consists of voluntary associations. But if civil norms in a more private setting such as that of families can also be questioned, what is the organized space for doing so? If civil norms can also regulate the conflicts that often arise in a private setting, *who or what regulates these norms*? Meyer does not address such questions, which might be because he assumes that civility can protect intimacy from conflict without itself being contested in the process. The question is, though, why a private civility should be any less contested than its public counterpart. Meyer does recognize that "liberal discourse is not magic" in the sense that civil norms cannot always prevent discord and sometimes even violence from destroying common dialogue and a mutual sense of respect (p. 75). But it is not considered whether civil norms can, and sometimes should, be questioned and renegotiated within close-knit communities to make them continuously better, even if they cannot become 'magical'. In this sense, Meyer does not explore whether civility in a more private setting can also imply a relation between ethics and politics; perhaps because it assumed that the private cannot be political.

A different approach that more clearly focuses on the relation between the public and the private as to both civility and civil society has been advanced by Deborah Eicher-Catt. Eicher-Catt claims that civility requires us to "live uncomfortably at the expressive/perceptive border or boundary between Self and Other, public and private, and intelligible and ineffable" (Eicher-Catt, 2013, p. 14). From this perspective, civility is not about making a clear separation between a public and private sphere but rather about *staying within the troubling border area between the two*. Thus, Deborah Eicher-Catt advances a conception of civility that is based on the distinction between public and private, which she connects to the phenomenological distinction between the intelligible and the ineffable. That is, the public is defined as a sphere of shared intelligibility while the private refers to something ineffable outside the bounds of intelligibility – a form of life that is not only unspoken but also mysterious and even "sacred" (p. 13). In relation to Meyer's focus on close-knit communities, such an unspoken and ineffable privacy might, for instance, be the close intimacy that at times exists between friends and family members. Drawing on Hannah Arendt, Eicher-Catt claims that "authentic civility" consists in the capacity to both reflectively negotiate the shifting

boundaries between the private and the public sphere as well as to appreciate the ineffability in human affairs "that must remain unspoken" given that it cannot become intelligible to us (p. 4).

These two normative requirements to civility seem to be in clear tension with each other in the sense that appreciating an ineffability which 'must remain unspoken' presupposes nearly fixed boundaries between the private and the public sphere, while negotiating shifting boundaries encourages us at the same time to recognize a certain gray zone in-between. But this tension is also what makes Eicher-Catt's conception of civility relevant in this context because it seems to entail a continuous development of the role that the public/private distinction plays as *both a certain form of moral standard and a contested dividing line*. From this perspective, civility implies what Eicher-Catt calls "good ambiguity" in the sense that one both acknowledges the persistence of distinctions such as the one between the public and the private and recognizes that they change through gaps and discontinuities. In this connection, she refers to a quote by Zygmunt Bauman that uncertainty is "the only soil in which morality can sprout and flourish" (p. 14). The tension within civility between the public and the private is, to Eicher-Catt, thus a positive feature.

To Eicher-Catt, civility necessarily implies some public/private distinction because civility is about showing respect for the ineffable, and thereby private, aspects of both oneself and others but within a public setting, which also entails blurred boundaries between the two. Civility implies that *the private becomes partly public* to recognize the private sphere for its own qualities. This means that civility on this account is a continually unfinished "existential boundary setting process" between not only the public and the private sphere but oneself and others as well (p. 1). However, given that different values such as inclusion and equality are often associated with civility, as I have shown through the previous chapters, it is not clear why only this form of respect for what is thought as ineffable should be *the defining feature* of civility and civil society. It is at least possible to raise the question of whether, for instance, an ideal of equality implied by civil norms can conflict with respect for the private sphere. In this regard, even if we grant that the porous boundaries between the ineffable and the intelligible are ubiquitous in social and political life – and that the private/public distinction is a way of negotiating these boundaries – Eicher-Catt

does not show why this issue is also that which should define civility or civil society as such. But it does provide a clear example of a notion of civility that is about defending the value of privacy.[28]

Overall, and to conclude this chapter, the analysis of John Keane and other's theorizations of civil society show that there does not seem to be a stable and unified idea of what the civil part of a civil society consists of. In this sense, Keane is right to characterize civil society as a signifier of plurality, even though we might also call this a 'plurality of twoness', a duality, in the sense that the approaches to the civil part of civil society seem *to repeatedly move in two directions* – that is, toward both a politically established societal sphere and a set of moral practices and values, which becomes most clear in Keane's own conception. Through this analysis of tendencies and problems within theories on civil society, I have highlighted how the previously elaborated aspects of civility can also be discussed through otherwise very different conceptions of what the civil in civil society implies. I have particularly focused on the distinction between the public and the private sphere since it is both prevalent in many conceptions of civil society and is furthermore useful to show how a more dynamic understanding of civility can provide an interpretation of how this distinction evolves. To further demonstrate such an approach to the 'civil' aspects of a theoretical issue which relates to the concept of civility, we will now focus on another topic that, at least in theoretical discussions, revolves partly around what being civil implies; the question of *civil disobedience*. Thereby, we turn to a strand of thought that is more concerned with societal change than the various theories on civil society. As I will argue, conceptions of civil disobedience most often also relate to civility but from a more conflictual and, at times, even revolutionary perspective. In this sense, these two chapters on civil society and civil disobedience complement each other because they, each in their own way, point to the wide range of social contexts where civility can play a role.

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[28] In a later chapter, we will discuss in depth what the exact relation between incivility and civility might be. With regard to Eicher-Catt's conception, it is noticeable that incivility is strictly separated from civility as being "about attacking or exposing the qualities of the ineffability within us" (Eicher-Catt, 2013, p. 13). In this connection, it seems to be the case that liberal interpretations of civility and civil society operate with *a more clear-cut separation between civility and incivility*, perhaps because they often base this upon the strong tendency in modern society to separate private and public life. But, as will be discussed later, such an interpretation of incivility as a breach of privacy is not as meaningful when there is considerable political contestation about what it is exactly that should remain ineffable, and thus private, and what should rather be 'attacked or exposed' for being morally problematic.

4. The civil in civil disobedience

In this chapter, I will first show how many theorizations of civil disobedience imply in various ways a relation between ethics and politics with some arguing for a more ethical interpretation while others offer a more political account of what civil disobedience is about. Even though it would be difficult to categorize each of the theorists that I refer to, it will also become clear throughout the chapter that it is more compatible with a liberal tradition to emphasize specific moral norms such as non-violence as the basis of civil disobedience, which I will show with several conceptions. Oppositely, a focus on how moral norms can be used by the dominating powers of society, or that they can be contested through civil disobedience itself, fits better with a critical theoretical approach. Thereafter, I will propose and argue that there are *different forms of civil disobedience* just as there are of civil society and that these forms seem to continuously develop instead of expressing the same substantial 'truth'. This is also meant to show the possibility that the civil in civil disobedience can imply a more dynamic relation between ethics and politics. For both parts of the chapter, I do not cover all problems, theories, or approaches to civil disobedience but analyze and discuss those that specifically focus on the civil part of civil disobedience.

Overall, the chapter is divided into three sections. The first section will compare and discuss liberal and critical theoretical accounts of civil disobedience that tend to conceive civil disobedience either as implying a political ethics with *established moral norms* or as an ethical politics in which norms are *continuously contested* through civil disobedience as a practice. The second section will consider what is perhaps the most prominent answer to what a substantial meaning of civil disobedience might be despite the wide range of various interpretations – namely, that it is about *collective political action*. In this regard, the second section also resembles the second part of the previous chapter that considered whether the public/private distinction could provide a substantial meaning to civil society. Finally, the third section will focus on whether civil disobedience can also be considered as having *a more formal character*, in which it can both change and develop significantly through different forms that are inherently connected to historical circumstances.

4.1.   Ethicizing and politicizing

To start with, the previously made distinction between ethical politics and political ethics as two opposite ways of conceiving civility can also be applied to analyze the quite extensive literature

on what civil disobedience is and whether it should be characterized as valuable. On the one hand, there is a strand of thought that characterizes civil disobedience as primarily concerned with ethics by referring to particularly non-violence but also conscientiousness, decency, respect toward others, and avoidance of hatred (Milligan, 2013, p. 36). On the other hand, many stress that civil disobedience is carried out by citizens and implies respect for a political community, which is normally interpreted as implying a willingness to follow law and order in general – that is, not being opposed to 'the rule of law' despite one's more limited lawbreaking – and to communicate one's actions openly or, more specifically, to a public sphere (Schock, 2015, p. 2; Smith, 2013, p. 3). In some versions of civil disobedience as a strong form of ethical politics, this also means that the norms associated with civil disobedience are constantly developed through the conflicts that it instigates. Usually, these two perspectives on civil disobedience as having both a moral and a political character at once seem *to fold into each other* as in the famous definition of civil disobedience by John Rawls as "a public, nonviolent, conscientious yet political act contrary to law" (Rawls, 1971, p. 364). That is, civil disobedience is conceived by theorists such as Rawls as *just as much an ethical as a political act*. In this sense, civil disobedience is most often interpreted as both a political practice and a set of moral standards that can be thought of either as deriving from politics itself or as regulating political practice from a position that is itself not political.

In the following pages, I will discuss more contemporary conceptions than, for instance, the influential definition by Rawls since these selected conceptions directly address the question about whether to interpret civil disobedience as a political ethics, an ethical politics, or something else. For this purpose, Tony Milligan' conception of civil disobedience will first be presented and analyzed as a clear example of a political ethics, while Robin Celikates' conception is considered afterwards as an interpretation of civil disobedience as an ethical politics. Finally, I will also focus on N. P. Adam's conception because it, as Celikates, too seems to put politics first by defining civil disobedience as a practice that is 'committed to the political', but this commitment can be interpreted as both a communal ethics and an engagement within an organized space of politics. In this sense, Adam's conception shows that not all theories about civil disobedience can be neatly classified as either a political ethics or an ethical politics, even though Adams does not seem to propose any dynamic notion of civil disobedience as something that evolves in-between the two.

As mentioned, it is possible to interpret civil disobedience as being mainly political or ethical which, for instance, Tony Milligan does when he argues for what he calls a "civility-focused account" of civil disobedience that only follows a list of basic moral norms such as a largely successful commitment to the avoidance of violence as well as a recognition "that other humans are *fellow humans,* i.e. members of the same moral community" (Milligan, 2013, p. 36). He opposes this to a "communication-based account" of civil disobedience, in which the primary focus is on the relations between not all fellow humans but only fellow citizens in the same political community. Thus, Milligan argues that examples of law-breaking such as covert actions of animal rescue from laboratories and eco-sabotage in the middle of the night to avoid capture should also count as civil disobedience if they stay within *the bounds of certain moral norms*. That is, even if an act of disobedience does not take place openly for other citizens to assess and discuss the act in a political context, it can still count as civil on Milligan's account. The defining question is not whether a civil disobedient actor addresses the public or enters into dialogue with fellow citizens. It is rather whether she follows norms of non-violence, respect, and basic recognition of other human beings, which can also be interpreted as liberal virtues because they are often claimed to provide *a form of minimal but universal morality* within a pluralist setting where, for instance, not everyone obeys the law. To Milligan, this does not entail that such an ethical conception of civil disobedience neatly divides all instances of disobedience into civil and uncivil ones. Even for this minimalist account of civility, there are still many instances of what we might call 'quasi-civil' disobedience, as when protestors attempt to avoid violence but partly fail in doing so. In Milligan's readings of classical references on civil disobedience such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, they also accepted at times that it was not completely possible to avoid that there would be, at least, some instances in which violence might occur within a civil disobedient movement responding to the violence unleashed by political authorities, particularly in cases of self-defense.

Thereby, Milligan's understanding of civil disobedience does not imply any specific political framework. The political component of civil disobedience seems only to be that it is an act of disobedience to whatever laws are politically being upheld in a society – not that it is civil. On this account, civility is that which provides *a basic morality for social relations in general* rather than norms for a political setting such as the idea that you should communicate your act of disobedience openly in a public sphere. This makes it possible for Milligan to propose a wide-ranging notion of civil disobedience covering particularly types of covert law-breaking that are not counted as civil

disobedience in more political accounts. In this sense, civil disobedience seems to be just an ethics of disobedience and not a *political ethics* since a covert and evasive act of civil disobedience might not relate to politics as an organized space of conflict by, for instance, entirely escaping notice in any public sphere. However, Milligan does not refer to civility in other contexts or elaborate the idea that it constitutes a universal ethics implying at least respect and non-violence but only focuses on the civil in civil disobedience, in which being civil is consistently something that you do in a political context simply by breaking the law. In this sense, even if civil disobedience on Milligan's account is only a *reaction* to political developments that establish certain laws without necessarily being an *active part* in changing such developments, it can still be characterized as a political ethics because it does affect the 'reach' of politics even if the moral norms that Milligan proposes are not subject to political contestation. That is, if civil disobedient actors evade the laws that are established through political processes this by itself influences *what politics can and cannot do.*

In stark contrast, Robin Celikates is a critical theorist who provides perhaps the clearest political interpretation of civil disobedience. To Celikates, civil disobedience follows a "political logic" with citizens as its actors and the change of specific laws, politics, or institutions as its aim. Such a definition is "less normatively demanding" since it only presupposes that there is *a political aim* ascribed to the act, designated in this regard as "principled", and not any specific order or manner that the act should follow (Celikates, 2016a, p. 985). Contrary to Milligan, this definition also marks a clear distinction between civil disobedience and conscientious objection in which the aim, to Celikates, is only to maintain a 'good conscience', which is principally indistinguishable from other types of criminal activity. Ultimately, what is only inside the mind of a criminal is outside the bounds of a political logic. However, whether civil disobedience must be, for instance, public, non-violent, and restricted by certain limits within a political system are deliberatively left out since all these questions are *politically contested*. With such a definition, Celikates claims that acts of civil disobedience always involve real struggles and confrontations between different actors, which cannot be understood if it is merely defined as a "symbolic protest" of a specific law in which the disagreeing parties already agree on, for instance, how to perceive and punish what is seen as violence in the first place. To Celikates, the question of what counts as violence is also part of *the struggle that civil disobedience expresses and develops further* since "everything depends on how violence is socially, politically, and legally (re-)defined" (Celikates, 2016b, p. 42).

Overall, Celikates advocates a "critical theory of civil disobedience" that is meant to correct some of the unjustified restrictions that the mainstream liberal model brings forward (Celikates, 2016a, p. 991). Celikates' critique of the liberal view on civil disobedience is, roughly put, that it is both *too much ethical and too little political*; that it does not provide enough space for democratic contestation and change such as when the disobedient actors question a whole institutionalized framework of politics. Celikates also develops a more critical theoretical focus on resistance to domination in society through his conception of civil disobedience by highlighting the role of "real confrontation" as a method of putting pressure on existing powerholders. As Celikates emphasizes, symbolic efficiency in the sense of getting a message about oppression or injustice across depends most often upon *a dramatization of disobedience* that is highly conflictual. The politics of civil disobedience implies a dramatic clash between those who break the law and those who uphold it. However, this account of civil disobedience can still be characterized as an *ethical politics* and not simply a politics of disobedience because there are still continuously moral norms that civil disobedience relates to, even though they are contested through civil disobedience itself. In this sense, civil disobedient actors cannot entirely disregard morality but must relate to moral norms somehow through the political practice of civil disobedience, which they also do by challenging them. Perhaps Celikates would still claim that this is *a purely political account*. But if civil disobedience is characterized by a contestation of "established norms, practices, institutions, and self-understandings" this must imply that civil disobedient actors do relate to ethics understood as established normative practices by, for instance, contesting the value of obeying the law (Celikates, 2021, p. 128). In this sense, civil disobedience is *a continuous politicization of moral norms*.

At first sight, a similar emphasis is found in N. P. Adams' argument that civil disobedience relies upon what he calls a 'commitment to the political'. But contrary to Celikates, Adams argues that this always excludes *other-directed personal violence* because "violence as an adjudication procedure devolves membership in a community into subjection to the strongest, and so is not a communal project at all".[29] To Adams, politics is about having a communal project of living together over time, and such violence is thought to be incompatible with treating other people as members of the same project since violence marks them as an "obstacle to be overcome" (Adams,

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[29] At the same time, Adams argues that civil disobedience can be 'violent' in another sense if it only destroys property – however, whether or when the destruction of property should be considered as being violent in the first place is a contested issue that cannot be discussed in-depth here (Adams, 2018, p. 476; Milligan, 2013, p. 123).

2018, p. 486). In this sense, Adams does not conceive of politics as necessarily involving conflict; what defines 'politics' is instead *community*. For this reason, Adams' conception of civil disobedience does not constitute as strong a form of ethical politics as Celikates' account because what civil disobedience cannot contest and thus politicize is exactly the community in which it takes place. Adams' conception of civil disobedience is thereby also difficult to interpret as either a political ethics or an ethical politics. The 'commitment to the political' that defines civil disobedience can be thought as *both a communal ethics and as an engagement within the space of politics* that the community in which civil disobedience emerges must also contain or constitute. What is difficult in this context is that Adams' notion of 'politics' does not contain a reference to conflict, even though civil disobedience is clearly difficult to interpret without any such reference.

This also relates to Adams' requirement that civil disobedience excludes personal violence because Adams seems to presuppose as *an indisputable fact* that personal violence always erodes our community. However, from a more political perspective this 'fact' might still be disputed and thus become subject to political conflict by disobedient actors who at least claim to be civil. In this sense, there can also be conflict about what a community as, amongst other things, a space of politics *requires to exist*. Adams might say that there is nothing contradictory about political actors eroding the space of politics itself through, for instance, the use of personal violence. But again, this must still presuppose that personal violence always results in such an erosion. In this regard, it is at least surprising that nation-states even exist as political communities given that both the police and military rely upon the threat and use of violence. A more intuitive approach to the role of violence in politics is rather that violent conflict often expresses throughgoing disagreement within the community we are members of, even if it can also result in a communal breakdown. A violent actor such as a police officer does not necessarily perceive criminals as 'obstacles to be overcome', but the use of violence testifies to a conflict within the community they are both part of. It might be a noble thought to imagine communities without the need for acting violently, but it is another thing to claim that violence can never become an appropriate way of solving an often already violent disagreement about what kind of *shared political project* people are committed to.

Both Adams and Celikates' conceptions of civil disobedience can also be discussed with a focus on those who are not members of a given political community. That is, should the norms for what counts as civil disobedience not also cover our relations to foreigners and the potentially violent

conflicts that may arise in this regard? Presumably, both Adams and Celikates would agree that it is, for instance, usually wrong to assault visitors to one's political community but this can still be characterized as civil disobedience if there is a distinct political purpose and it does not involve any violence to fellow citizens. A similar problem arises with citizens who are treated as members of a political community but assert that they are quite the opposite and might organize themselves in secession movements. Are they barred from appealing to civil disobedience or not? A possible line of thought is to demand – as John Rawls already did in his writings on the topic – that political actors should make sure that they do not result in a major destabilization of the polity; that is, in anarchy and thus in the absence of any government at all. But the activists in a secession movement, for instance, might not just accept such an image of there being either order or chaos but can instead argue that they want to fundamentally *alter the borders between different political communities* – or even that there has never truly been a 'shared political project' in the first place.

In this regard, it seems at least counterintuitive that civil disobedience as a certain form of ethico-political action cannot apply in these cases because the actors are not committed to the same political community. In contrast to this, proponents of what is often called *cosmopolitan civil disobedience* claim that we can also characterize illegal actions as civil disobedience when citizens from foreign countries travel across the world to other jurisdictions and communities to protest in a non-violent manner what they perceive as global injustice such as in Greenpeace's spectacular actions (Cooke, 2021). As the reference to a 'cosmopolitan' aspect implies, such actions often address a global audience and can be interpreted as interventions in *a global political community*. However, given that the local authorities and perhaps also a significant part of the population in the local context where activists from other parts of the world arrive do not perceive themselves as being such cosmopolitans, they do not seem to share a community in Adams' sense of the term.[30]

All in all, particularly the more political approach to civil disobedience faces a challenge regarding how moral norms of civil disobedience relate to its political setting. This problem of how to formulate a coherent ethico-political interpretation of civil disobedience can also be related to the

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[30] Celikates has also acknowledged that even his inclusive conception of civil disobedience might not cover all the "most challenging radical struggles of today" such as indigenous struggles for self-determination against the powers of modern nation-states (Celikates, 2021, p. 146). Referring to Celikates' own concepts, this might also be because such struggles follow *a military logic* instead of a political logic, which points to other challenges and justifications. However, just as we talk about 'international politics' such struggles are, at least in everyday speech, most often also characterized as political, even if they to some extent imply confrontations between different political communities.

question concerning whether civil disobedience has one substantial meaning or if it is a 'signifier of plurality' in John Keane's words that points to *different forms of ethico-political action* rather than one. Perhaps the idea that there is one substantial meaning of civil disobedience is also an attempt *to stall the dynamic between ethics and politics* that civil disobedience expresses in various ways. At least, the question is whether there can even be a theoretical foundation for how to conceive civil disobedience when what we associate with it is continually contested, as Robin Celikates and others argue. In the next part of the chapter, I will discuss one influential idea that does posit such a theoretical foundation for what civil disobedience is, namely the idea that civil disobedience is about *collective political action*. The main reason for why this idea has become so influential and is perhaps still the most prominent answer to what civil disobedience is 'essentially' about is most likely that the focus on civil disobedience as a concept has been significantly influenced and shaped by the rise of Western social movements in the 1960s and 1970s (Pineda, 2021). In the following section, I will mainly analyze and discuss Hannah Arendt's view on civil disobedience as clearly representative of this idea. In this connection, I will argue that the approach makes it difficult to capture different forms of civil disobedience but that it does point to a relevant issue about the connection between an actor's intentions and the impacts of a civil disobedient act.

4.2.   Imagine a single individual!

Both ethics and politics also play a certain role when some theorists expand the concept of civil disobedience to include not only law-breaking but also noncompliance to non-legal moral norms. As a clear example of this, Jason D. Hill claims that civil disobedience should be called *civil noncompliance*; a term that connotes not simply law-breaking but also 'norm-breaking' in a broader sense. To Hill, civil noncompliance is "a form of moral insurrectionalism – a revolt against ways in which nonnegotiated mainstreamed applied norms permeate our life worlds and human interactions" (Hill, 2013, p. x). Hill's broad conception of civil disobedience also provides an example, similar to Celikates' political approach, of how critical theoretical perspectives most often apply the notion to capture a wide range of resistances to domination. But, according to Hill, it is not so much norms such as non-violence but its "fixed encasement in the juridical registers of formal legalese" that we must "emancipate" civil disobedience from in both theory and practice (Ibid.,). In this sense, civil disobedience itself must be more inclusive of possibilities for resistance if it is to promote a more inclusive and equal society. In contrast to Celikates, Hill does not even

seem to distinguish civil disobedience from *armed insurrections*, which makes it possible to propose both an overlap between everyday activism and civil disobedience, on the one end of a wide spectrum, and an overlap between civil war and civil disobedience. Even if this is rather counterintuitive, the common expression 'civil war' can thus be applied to designate an extreme but *still possible form of civil disobedience* if we grant that a war characterized as civil can be thought of as a violent uprising meant to transform both legal and non-legal norms in a society.[31] This might destroy established moral norms and spaces of politics but it can also create new ones. It can easily be objected that such a suggestion stretches the concept of civil disobedience *entirely beyond recognition*, which is probably right given current usage, but it still points to the possibility of rethinking and thereby recognizing civil disobedience in different forms than we imagine today.

In this sense, civil disobedience can be thought of as a quite far-reaching practice. This relates to the influential idea that civil disobedience is a certain type of collective action. That is, this idea most often also implies that civil disobedience brings about change throughout the whole of society, even though it might still exclusively refer to lawbreaking. From this perspective, civil disobedience is always a collective practice that cannot be instigated by an individual acting on her own since this type of action requires *a group effort* (Hassan, 2017). Particularly Hannah Arendt' influential essay on civil disobedience from 1970 has spread this view. In the essay, Arendt applies her conception of politics as being about 'acting in concert' directly to the concept of civil disobedience as a political act. In this way, Arendt provides a characterization of civil disobedient actors as "organized minorities" who, on the basis of some common agreement, arrange a "group action" to protest governmental policy (Arendt, 1972, pp. 55-56). This is opposed to conscientious objection, which Arendt defines as an act that has not gone through such a 'validation procedure' of agreement between citizens but only arises from an individual's own and private conscience.

In some parts of the essay, one may get the impression that Arendt sees this as *a practical problem* and that civil disobedience must simply include more people to have an impact, as when she writes ironically: "Imagine a single individual disregarding traffic laws!" (1972, p. 55). This might be an

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[31] A philosophical investigation into what a civil war implies can thus also include a focus on the concept of civility. As another example of this, John Keane distinguishes between what he calls the civil and the 'uncivil' war depending on whether a violent conflict upholds certain ethical standards – even though this latter approach seems quite far from common usage where civil war just refers to violent conflict within a country (Keane, 1996, p. 137).

understandable perspective given the rise of mass demonstrations in the 1960s, but today we can even turn the screw a bit more and say: "Imagine a single individual disregarding treason laws and risking the death penalty!" – and yet still point to cases in which, for instance, whistle-blowers have done this with a major impact. But, to Arendt, the problem is also not just about practicality or merely a matter of definition. That is, an individual following what Arendt calls "the counsels of conscience" cannot be a civil disobedient actor because these so-called 'counsels' also tend to be both subjective, apolitical, and not nearly as reliable as a political objective evolved through cooperation and deliberation. In addition, they "hinge on interest in the self" and what we as individuals can 'live with' rather than what is right for a larger community. In this sense, we cannot instigate civil disobedience individually because *selfishness* becomes a major part of the equation.

But even if this critique of individual action is true, at least to some extent, the crucial question is whether such a critique is relevant for conceiving the political and the ethical aspects of civil disobedience.[32] To Arendt, civil disobedience implies the crucial norm that especially when we intend to break the law with a political purpose we ought to act collectively instead of individually. However, particularly from a more liberal perspective politics necessarily involves individuals and it is, at least, counterintuitive to claim that individuals should not also act as political agents. Modern democracy is in many ways built on the assumption that each individual can take a stance and reflect upon societal issues before she, for instance, votes or becomes engaged in public debate. Furthermore, selfishness does not need to reside just on an individual level. What are social and economic interest groups that act politically if not 'selfish' by only focusing on their own interests? Regardless, the individual is *a political actor that can act disobediently*, and it is not entirely clear why such an actor cannot also focus on a larger community instead of only his or her own interests.

Based on my previously elaborated conception of politics, it is worth mentioning that civil disobedience as a political act might also take place *within individuals* in the sense that authority most often does not stands completely outside of us but possesses the power it has because it is at least partly internalized. If we grant that politics can sometimes also develop through individuals' dreams, fantasies, and psychic life in general – as touched upon earlier in the thesis about the

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[32] We can be sure that Arendt's critique is not self-evident by reading other theorists of civil disobedience who, in a opposite manner, propose *conscientiousness* as a defining characteristic. For example, Kimberley Brownlee includes a "steadfast personal commitment" in her definition of civil disobedience, which in turn makes it difficult to fit collective law-breaking action, at least bigger crowds of people, into such a conception (Brownlee, 2012, p. 18).

political struggle within the Zulu brother's dreams – civil disobedience can, at least in principle, become *an inner struggle* as well. This hardly covers lawbreaking given that laws, at least so far, do not meaningfully apply to how we think or feel, but civil disobedience can become such an inner struggle if it is also covers norm-breaking as previously discussed. Perhaps, a radical act of civil disobedience within a dream might even cause a lot more change than a similar act would in the 'real world' if this transforms one's more entrenched psychic hindrances. As earlier argued regarding Lisa Mitchell's critique of a liberal individualization of civility, this does not mean that the distinction between individuals and collectives should not be considered when we theorize civil disobedience. But political agency can also develop *both within and between individuals and collectives*. In this connection, the distinction itself between these two categories does not seem particularly relevant for the definition of what counts as civil in civil disobedience in the first place.

A more relevant conceptual opposition to consider is the one between *intention* and *impact*; two dimensions of civil disobedience that are in most cases difficult to distinguish but still present at the same time. That is, we can at least imagine a citizen intending to disobey civilly but failing somehow – as Arendt remarks, no one may notice a single person disregarding traffic laws to protest an unjust war – or, oppositely, imagine someone who disobeys for other reasons but whose act of disobedience still becomes politically significant. The suicide of the Tunisian merchant Mohamed Bouazizi in 2010, whose last action of his life triggered a whole upheaval known as the Arab Spring in Tunisia and other countries in the Middle East and North Africa, could be an example of the latter. Even though Bouazizi set himself alight publicly in front of the Sidi Bouzid Municipal Office after his merchandise had been confiscated by a police officer, his intentions were not clearly to stage any political protest. This spectacular suicide might just have been an act of desperation due to a loss of livelihood without any further intentions (Kallio, 2017, pp. 91-93). In most conceptions of civil disobedience, some intentions of an ethical or political character such as conscientiousness and principledness are required. But particularly in the case of collective action, which Arendt and others posit as constitutive of what civil disobedience is, it is not clear whether we can always assess the intentions of a larger collective *given that it has any*. In that sense, the impact of civil disobedience might be the only thing that we can meaningfully focus on.

This relates as well to the discussion about what the formal and substantial aspects of civility point to. That is, the disparity between intention and impact raises the question of whether what we

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perceive as the 'substance' of civil disobedience such as non-violence is developed and formed continually through the unpredictable impact of civil disobedient actions. This would also entail that a civil disobedient actor does not have full control over what an instance of civil disobedience means in a larger context. If the impact is crucial for what civil disobedience is and can become, we cannot be entirely sure that we are also civil when we intend to become civil disobedient. In the next part of this chapter, I will discuss these questions further by relating them to the problem of who it is that can meaningfully 'label' and legitimize an action as being civil disobedience and whether civil disobedience is, ultimately, one single thing at all. In this regard, I will argue that we can at least state that there are various *forms of interpretation* that continually both expand and limit our ideas about what civil disobedience implies from a more substantial perspective. As a starting point for the discussion about the more formal character of civil disobedience, Candice Delmas' conception of civil disobedience will be considered at first since it implies a reference to "decorum", which seems to be dependent on historical circumstances and thereby also changeable.

4.3. Authorizing civil disobedience

As mentioned, the distinction between intention and impact touches upon the question of whether there even is a unified set of actions that can be described as civil disobedience. In this regard, an influential theorist whose conception is particularly relevant to consider is Candice Delmas. As the title of her book, *A Duty to Resist: When Disobedience Should be Uncivil*, points to, Delmas defends the use of so-called 'uncivil disobedience' when "agents are oppressed, silenced, and otherwise marginalized" (Delmas, 2018, p. 68). In this connection, Delmas presents a list of four norms associated with civil disobedience that provides the basis for conceiving both civil and uncivil disobedience. The first three ("publicity", "non-evasiveness", and "non-violence") are also common in other theoretical accounts of what counts as civil disobedience, even though their meaning is often discussed as we have already seen with non-violence. There is, for instance, an ongoing debate about whether non-evasiveness implies an acceptance of punishment (Lefkowitz, 2018; Svanøe, 2018). The fourth however, designated as "decorum", is less common but also more interesting in this connection since the term often implies *historical contingency* and development.

At first sight, Candice Delmas seems to characterize what she calls "civility-as-decorum" as being independent of any given societal order. "Respect for others as equals" and "commitment to mutual reciprocity", which she understands as basic requirements when following decorum, are described

as standards that are not relative to a particular time or place. In this sense, even though political protests and resistance movements can be excused not to follow decorum in certain circumstances, it is nevertheless evident what it means for a disobedient actor "to behave in a dignified and polite manner and avoid causing offense" (Delmas, 2018, p. 43). However, it is also clear that how we practice politeness and avoid causing offense depends on *the cultural context* that sets the stage for an act of civil disobedience. Delmas herself seems to acknowledge this when she, for instance, characterizes Pussy Riot's happenings in Russia as uncivil primarily because they "caused outrage". The same goes for the method of peaceful roadblocks that, to Delmas, become uncivil if they cause inconvenience or "are seen as reckless and disrespectful", which must also depend on what is exactly perceived as being 'reckless' and 'disrespectful' in a specific context (Loc. Cit.).[33] She also describes decorum as a "flawed mark of civility" that should not be taken at "face value" because particularly this one of the four norms can be used to oppress disobedient actors by denying to recognize them as civil because they at least do not *appear* as respectful in a given context (Delmas, 2021, p. 213). Decorum can thereby also make it unclear whether one ought to simply appear as respectful or truly aspire to be respectful if they are not always the same thing.

Drawing upon my reading of Delmas above, it is furthermore possible that the practice of civil disobedience cannot be separated from the ways that civil disobedience as an expression is used to legitimate certain acts of disobedience. What we perceive as civil disobedience is also part of what counts as civil disobedience if being recognized as practicing civil disobedience within a certain context is part of what makes one 'avoid causing offence' and thereby follow decorum. In this sense, 'civil disobedience' is not just a label that is put on a certain act from a distance if *the use of the term itself is also an active part* in the assessment of whether a certain disobedient act follows decorum and thus qualifies as being civil disobedience on at least Delmas' conception. From this perspective, civil disobedience implies, at least partly, a performative speech act in the sense that part of what constitutes civil disobedience is that it is discursively labeled as such. In other words, the discourse on civil disobedience might constitute an inherent part of its practice. This does not necessarily contradict the idea that civil disobedience follows requirements that do

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[33] In an article from 2020 Delmas writes that decorum, characterized again as behaving in 'a dignified and polite manner', implies that people follow "the conventional social scripts that spell out the ways of showing respect in their society" (Çıdam et al., 2020, p. 520). In this sense, Delmas does also seem to imply that being respectful always requires that we show respect in a culturally specific manner, that we follow certain 'conventions'.

not depend on whether they are accepted by a given society. It might just be that *it is not enough* for an instance of disobedience to be civil that it follows these requirements such as non-violence and publicity. Perhaps an action must also be recognized as civil disobedience to become so.[34]

But regardless, both the theory and practice of civil disobedience are hugely influenced by those authorities as well as cultural traditions that constitute the setting for political conflict. It is perhaps not by accident that Henry David Thoreau's famous essay from 1948 was originally called *Resistance to Civil Government* and first posthumously titled *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*, which means that Thoreau is probably falsely credited with coining the term (Laudani, 2013, p. 94). That is, civil disobedience is in this sense not just dependent on the actors but also its reference to a government whose authority is recognized as civil. At least, civil disobedience is an idea that not only implies certain requirements on the disobedient actor but often also a societal frame that determines somehow *what may count as civil*. Even though civil disobedience is per definition an act of defiance against authorities, the narrative of what civil disobedience implies can also be used by authorities to justify a certain political system. Such a strategic justification can refer to aspects of civil disobedience such as non-violence, politeness, and publicity as indirect 'proof' that the current political system is so fairly constituted that, for instance, violent or covert resistance cannot be justified. But does this also entail that civil disobedience as *a practice on its own* – and not just the narratives about what civil disobedience means and when it is justified – develops through changes in both ethics, politics, and their relation to each other? As already mentioned, 'decorum' and the discursive labeling of something as civil disobedience can at least be thought of as constitutive parts of civil disobedience that also continuously change with historical circumstances and different forms of civil disobedience. In this sense, civil disobedience does not remain the same type of ethico-political action over time but rather *develops in between ethics and politics*. According to Candice Delmas, we ought to recognize that there is a stable "civil disobedience playbook" of socially acceptable norms for disobedient action, which cannot simply be changed by theoretical redefinitions (2021, p. 211). But even if such a 'playbook' with requirements cannot just be changed overnight, this does not mean that it constitutes an unchangeable political ethics.

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[34] In relation to this, Delmas argues that there has emerged *a mythological aspect* pertaining to the current use of the concept in the Anglo-Saxon world with Henry David Thoreau, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King as what Delmas calls a "holy trinity" of civil disobedience. This 'trinity' is often mentioned and admired regardless of whether their actions do indeed fit the various definitions of what civil disobedience implies (Delmas, 2018, p. 7).

As an example of how civil disobedience itself might develop through new forms of interpretation and legitimation of certain acts of disobedience, it is relevant to focus on how the more liberal practice of civil disobedience as a public and non-evasive act of lawbreaking is being challenged these years. As Derek Edyvane and Enes Kulenovic argue, the liberal interpretation of civil disobedience particularly does not cover justified acts of covert law-breaking that they call "disruptive disobedience". To Edyvane and Kulenovic, covert law-breaking can also be justified when citizens become subject to democratic exclusion in the form of being denied equal access to either basic resources or public services. In this sense, citizens are not only protesting but resisting the undemocratic rules of the game that exclude them in perhaps a variety of ways: "Citizens fight against exclusion by disrupting and making meaningless those laws, rules, norms, or policy solutions that foster that exclusion" (Edyvane & Kulenovic, 2017, p. 1364). Thus, the point is that one cannot just protest within the limits of the existing public sphere or the democratic framework if the goal is to change from an excluded position what counts as public and democratic in the first place – which is, at least in their view, too revolutionary to fit into the liberal tradition. This notion of 'disruptive disobedience' applies to quite a few contemporary examples of principled law-breaking such as hacktivists disclosing classified information and people assisting illegal migrants. In this regard, it might be that civil disobedience today is a more liberal practice, but a rising acceptance of such disruptive disobedience can possibly change what kind of practice it is. From this perspective, civil disobedience implies *a historically situated tradition of ethico-political action* rather than a list of eternal requirements for what a civil disobedient act ought to look like.

At least today, it seems that there is still much tension between liberal and critical theoretical conceptions of civil disobedience, which reflects *ongoing conflicts about defining both its meaning and its significance*. This seems to be different from the concept of civil society, as presented in the previous chapter, where liberal and critical theoretical approaches more often align in, for instance, describing civil society as both a space of individual rights and freedom of association as well as a political arena of social movements and other actors who exercise critique of those in power. In contrast to this, civil disobedience is a concept that does not fit neatly into either a liberal or a critical theoretical framework. As mentioned earlier, more liberal theorists such as John Rawls often warn about the dangers of civil disobedient actors transgressing established boundaries of both a moral and political character such as, for instance, when Rawls explicitly cautions against destabilizing the political community as such. In these matters, a common approach is to turn this

into a definitional issue in the sense that such transgressions are defined as *going beyond civil disobedience*, even if this might be justified at times. In contrast, critical theoretical approaches advocate going beyond what they designate as the liberal model of civil disobedience. As Edyvane and Kulenovic, many critical theorists assume that this also implies at least a partial abandonment of civil disobedience itself as *a concept irrevocably tainted by liberalism*. This is what Bernard Harcourt clearly advocated in the aftermath of the Occupy movement when he argued that their resistance and collective action ought to be characterized as "political disobedience" instead of civil disobedience (Harcourt, 2012). However, what might become lost in such a critical move is an analysis of disobedience within *an ethico-political context*, which implies that acts of disobedience are not merely assessed as to their political implications but also their moral aspects.

This is also why Candis Delmas' insistence on maintaining the distinction between civil and uncivil disobedience, despite her critical theoretical appraisal of uncivil disobedience in certain circumstances, is both relevant and meaningful given that it still posits the analysis of various forms of principled disobedience within an ethico-political context. As Delmas also points to, the notion of uncivil disobedience can be analytically useful to categorize a type of disobedience that does share certain characteristics with civil disobedience such as being about principled law-breaking with a communicative dimension, which distinguishes uncivil disobedience from both less conscionable forms of criminal activity as well as acts of terrorism that only aim to eradicate perceived enemies. In this regard, both *uncivil disobedience* and *uncivil society* are useful to maintain as notions for at least some analytical purposes, even if the boundaries between what is posited as either civil or uncivil might, at times, be questionable and presumably also changeable. Given that we do not assume that we can establish once-and-for-all what characteristics belong to either civil or uncivil disobedience, both concepts can also be considered as open for self-critique and reflections on their potentially dynamic relation to each other. In this sense, even though we might state that (un)civil disobedience follows both a 'moral logic' and a 'political logic', we can at the same time *continually discuss and even develop in practice* what these two logics imply.[35]

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[35] The same can presumably also be said of the distinction between civil and uncivil obedience, even though such a focus on different ethico-political ways of *abiding by* instead of breaking the law is less common in both everyday speech and theoretical accounts. In this regard, Jessica Bulman-Pozen and David E. Pozen's conception of uncivil obedience and its legal implications stands out as a thought-provoking interpretation of this distinction, which also

To conclude this chapter, it seems that both the relation between politics and ethics as well as formal and substantial aspects of civility are connected to the current theoretical discussions on civil disobedience – both within a more liberal tradition and in conceptions that challenge this tradition from a critical theoretical perspective. Even if civil disobedience as a concept is not more contested than the debates on what counts as civil society, it clearly implies a perspective on civility that is more focused on contested issues and how to engage civilly in societal conflicts. The same might also be said of related concepts such as 'civil resistance' and 'civil war', which I have only touched upon briefly in this chapter. That is, at least these two concepts imply a similar contestation but in a more far-reaching manner as to the level of the conflicts in question. Civil resistance, civil disobedience, and civil war might therefore all point to *an unfinished and changing structure that forms both our understanding and continued practice of civility*. If this is indeed the case, civility can also become split between radically different positions within social and political life. Whether we, for instance, practice civility with a concern for stability and unity or do the exact opposite depends, at least partly, on our position in society that marks the outlook from within.

With this concluding perspective that points to the possibility of conceiving civility as a more dynamic relation between ethics and politics, I will also conclude the first part of the thesis. Overall, in the four chapters that constitute this first part of the thesis it has become clear that some sort of relation between ethics and politics is implied by both liberal and critical theoretical conceptions. However, *the constitution and internal dynamic of this relation* have not been developed in-depth theoretically. Roughly put, liberal conceptions often interpret civility as a political ethics, while critical theorists tend to conceive of civility as an ethical politics. To recapitulate on this analytical distinction, civility as a political ethics is about moral norms influencing political conflict while civility as an ethical politics is instead about political conflict establishing, developing, and contesting moral norms. From this perspective, it is not surprising that liberals more often defend civility than critical theorists because civility as a political ethics can easily be justified as a way of setting moral limits to what is perceived as the bad effects of at least contemporary politics. However, what both traditions share is an emphasis that *the direction*

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resembles Candice Delmas' notion of uncivil disobedience. Similar to Delmas' idea that being uncivil implies a breach of decorum, Bulman-Pozen and Pozen claim that being uncivilly obedient implies that one obeys a certain law in a way that is "unusually defiant of established social practice" (Bulman-Pozen & Pozen, 2015, p. 811). But once again, this must also entail a question about whether uncivil obedience should be considered as a more dynamic concept given that 'established social practice' is often not as established as we might think it is.

of influence mainly goes one way, from politics to ethics or from ethics to politics, in contrast to a more dynamic process. In the second part of the thesis, I will develop a reconceptualization of civility that relies upon the analyses and discussions from the first part. In this regard, the guiding question for this reconceptualization is what the concept of civility can tell us about the dynamic relation between politics and ethics. The claim raised and argued for in the second part of the thesis is that positing and interpreting the concept of civility from a *distinct ontological perspective on both ethics and politics* provides a largely unexplored but meaningful way to answer this question.

PART TWO:
A DIVISION THAT RELATES TO ITSELF

In this second part of the thesis, the purpose is not to present the most meaningful conception of civility as such, if this is even possible, but instead to develop a conception that particularly helps us to grasp the relation between ethics and politics. To do so, there are several steps that will be taken through the four chapters of this part of the thesis. The two first chapters develop the broad contours of this new conception of civility with first a focus on the *boundaries of civility* and thereafter a focus on its *internal constitution*. In the first chapter, we will thus begin with the boundaries of civility and particularly the relation between civility and incivility. The main purpose of this is to argue that both civility and incivility imply a relation between ethics and politics, which provides a distinct ontological perspective on what civility can be. The second chapter will focus on a question that relates to the recurrent distinction between formal and substantial aspects of civility in the first part of the thesis: How can civility be conceived in a context of change? Can it be conceived as both inherently changeable and yet something distinct? In this regard, I will propose that *internal conflict* provides a meaningful way of arguing that it both has a substantial meaning and constantly develops into new forms. The two last chapters then focus on how these broad contours can be developed into a comprehensive reconceptualization. The third chapter will consider what an *ontological* interpretation of civility as a relation between ethics and politics requires. In this regard, I will discuss Étienne Balibar's conception of civility since it provides a noticeable example of an ontological approach. Briefly put, Balibar interprets civility as a crucial category within a broader political ontology that operates with three central concepts. However, I will also argue that this does not clearly capture a relation between ethics and politics, even though Balibar points to a 'metapolitical' dimension to civility from which I will draw inspiration. Finally, the last chapter will build on top of the three previous chapters regarding the boundaries of civility, the role of change, and the ontological approach to fully develop and argue for a reconceptualization of civility as a mode of normativity connecting ethics and politics.

As mentioned, the first chapter will focus on the boundaries of civility and therefore also incivility, which is often thought as being the direct opposite of civility. But what I will particularly argue is that civility and incivility can be meaningfully considered as partly connected to each other and

that the relation between the two also continuously develops. The underlying point with this is that they both evolve as normatively significant practices within the same ethico-political context. As already mentioned, it is worth noting that the first chapter does not yet propose exactly what civility consists of but mainly focuses on its boundaries and thereby the context within which civility both emerges and develops. Since I have also showed in the first part of the thesis that conceptions of civility most often imply a relation between ethics and politics, it might seem as if positing civility within an ethico-political context is a rather small step to take. However, what I argue is that this ethico-political context can be conceived as *a defining feature of civility.* In this sense, the next chapter also provides a negative delimitation of what civility is on this account by arguing that in situations where ethics and politics are not connected, or do not even exist, civility cannot emerge.

5. Incivility is 'in civility'

Before going into discussions on the concept of incivility, this chapter will start by focusing on why it is indeed meaningful to focus on that which is considered civility's conceptual opposite. In this regard, I will argue that the formal aspects of civility point to what can be called *a necessary contingency*, which is related to previous discussions about civility's cultural specificity – or in David Theo Goldberg's words, to its 'multiplicitous expressions'. Such a necessary contingency makes it difficult to definitively establish the boundaries of civility and separate civility from incivility. With inspiration from theorists who question whether civility has a clearly established meaning and value, it will also be argued throughout this chapter that if we conceive civility as *normatively ambivalent* due to its different forms this does not merely entail an irreducible uncertainty about whether civility can always be justified but also a troubling question of whether civility and incivility can at times become indistinguishable. I will thereby show that if civility is necessarily contingent this must mean that *the difference, or lack thereof, between civility and incivility also evolves* both in gradual steps and sometimes even through revolutionary events given that revolutions can be characterized by sudden shifts in our basic values and standards. In this regard, I will suggest that we introduce another concept, 'acivility', to signify that which is more clearly different from civility than incivility is. The relevance of such a neologism is that it shows how the relation between ethics and politics, which both civility and incivility imply, is not just a 'background feature' like how civility today takes place amongst human beings on this planet that we inhabit. As I will develop further in the next chapters, it can also be conceived as a defining feature of them both in the sense that civility and incivility are about developing such a relation.

The chapter is divided into three parts. In the first section, we will begin by focusing on the influential conception of civility presented by Cheshire Calhoun since it proposes an explicit answer to the question about the boundaries of civility within a moral framework but also raises new and unresolved questions, which relates to the fact that this conception is not posited within an ethico-political context. The purpose of this discussion is also to highlight that it is possible to conceive civility and its boundaries without referring to both ethics and politics, which means that a reconceptualization of civility meant to help us understand the relation between ethics and politics cannot just assume in advance that civility is connected to them both. Even though most liberal and critical theoretical conceptions point to a relation between ethics and politics, as I

argued in the first part of the thesis, this is not necessarily the case given that civility can be interpreted in so many ways. In the second section, another approach to the boundaries of civility that is recurring in the literature will be considered, which is the claim that civility is normatively ambivalent and that it can change through self-critique as well. It will be argued that this is a promising approach that also makes it possible to acknowledge grey zones between civility and incivility. But what it does not theorize is the common denominator for both civility and civility, which, as I argue in the third section, is *the ethico-political context in which they are both located*. In the third section, I will develop this interpretation through a distinction between (in)civility and acivility to conceptualize how this ethico-political context can be thought of as a defining feature.

5.1.   Aware of its internal limits?

It is often recognized that the boundaries of civility relate to the question of how much civility changes since, for instance, establishing a relatively stable distinction between civility and incivility must require that they both maintain *certain recognizable features* over time. That civility can be somewhat changeable, at least through its connection to culturally variable norms, is recognized by not only critics of civility but also supporters or so-called 'civilitarians' (Bejan & Garsten, 2014). Even an ardent civilitarian as Stephen Carter acknowledges that civil norms change while maintaining that individuals should usually not instigate such changes (Carter, 1998, pp. 82-84). But how can you characterize any boundaries of civility and maintain a clear difference between civility and incivility if they seem to change again and again? In the following, I will focus on Cheshire Calhoun's seminal article on civility as a starting point for this discussion since Calhoun also relates civility to changing norms by developing an elaborate argument which says that civility consists of nothing but "conformity to socially established rules of respect, tolerance and considerateness" (Calhoun, 2000, p. 255). In this sense, civility is *necessarily contingent* since it is, according to Christopher F. Zurn' interpretation of Calhoun, always tied to "particularistic, contingent, contextually social rules of behavior" (Zurn, 2013, p. 344). But such conformity can also be thought of as a key to interpreting civility as *a distinct virtue*; a morally relevant concept

that distinguishes it from actual respect, tolerance, and considerateness. In this view, you are not necessarily respectful if you are civil, but you still display this positive attitude toward others.[36]

According to Calhoun, the capability of being able to communicate moral attitudes is valuable because morality is fundamentally about social relations and therefore always calls for forms of communication. Calhoun thereby interprets civility as *an ethics of communication* that is particularly valuable to regulate life in a pluralistic society with dialogue between people who are not like-minded. However, this interpretation does not seem to constitute a distinct *political* ethics because civility is meant to play an essential role for society in general and not just politics. The importance of civility on this account does not mean that it is thereby perfect since it is also conceived as a somewhat flawed ethics. Calhoun emphasizes that since we live in what she calls *a morally imperfect social world* we must also at times choose between – or, at the very least, reflect upon – the possible difference between being civil and truly treating people with, for instance, respect. Calhoun mentions the ambivalent case of 'ladies-first' customs with men holding doors for women, where it seems questionable today that such a little ritual does express respect toward the other. Thereby, Calhoun points to the possibility that civility can, at least in principle, also become *a capability for communicating immoral attitudes* if the practice of civility is not necessarily coupled with morality. But how can we know whether we have crossed the boundary that, for instance, separates communicating what is thought of as respect and truly treating people respectfully? If there is at times a sharp difference between the two, this must entail that civility can, in the worst of circumstances, become *a mere semblance of morality* rather than the real thing.

To Calhoun, inquiring into such a question requires the adoption of a "socially critical moral point of view" where we step aside, at least for a moment, from established and conventionally expressed norms (Calhoun, 2000, p. 263). In this sense, critical reflection does not constitute a part of the communicative practice of civility because when you reflect upon or subvert existing norms you do something different than when you engage in civility. This is also the reason why Calhoun and many others advocate an idea of the 'bounds of civility' understood as all those situations in which civility is thought not to apply. But, at the same time, it is presumed by Calhoun that these internal

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[36] Mark Kingwell also expresses such a line of thought by stating that civility only demands that we treat one another *as if* we are being respectful, which must presuppose that it can sometimes be meaningful to distinguish between being and just seeming respectful – even if this difference is usually irrelevant (Kingwell, 1995, p. 247).

limits or bounds can be prescribed by civility itself: "Civility norms need to tell us which intentional misbehaviors on other's part we are required to respond to civilly and which we aren't" (p. 267). According to Calhoun, such boundaries are set as well through socially established rules. We cannot judge ourselves on what is owed a civil response and what is not if we engage in civility. This is instead the current standards of society that we must follow. The bounds of civility have been reached when we respond to something where there is "social closure on its intolerability", such as when we in Western societies may react uncivilly to blatant remarks of racism (p. 271). But, to Calhoun, this *conformity at the core of civility* does not diminish the value of it as a moral virtue. Quite the opposite, civility's dependence on social norms makes civility valuable because it is important to engage in morality as a social practice that requires us to develop and sustain a common language and cultural practice with *shared standards for what is morally right and wrong*.

However, given that civility is still about the display of respect, tolerance, and considerateness, which are all moral virtues on Calhoun's account, it cannot just consist of mindlessly following any established rules of conduct. Presumably, I must be able to judge a certain practice as, at least on the surface, displaying *an appearance of morality* in order to recognize it as being civil and to practice it myself. In this sense, there must be some connection between truly being, for instance, respectful and displaying respect if there is to be any significant difference between displaying respect and displaying the opposite. Even *a false copy must resemble the original* in some way. If civility is a capability to communicate moral attitudes, this must also entail some role of moral judgment for a civil actor to be able to at least appear moral. In principle, we might by accident communicate moral attitudes and even repeat this over time without being aware that this is what we are doing, but this hardly counts as a capability. However, Calhoun does not explain what the role of such judgment might be due to *the distinction between civility and a critical point of view*.

This unresolved issue must also apply to the internal limits of civility since they relate to moral judgment as well. To appear to distinguish between what is owed a civil response and what is not must also relate somehow to what is 'truly' right and wrong to distinguish, even if it is merely a display. Suppose, for instance, that it is deemed intolerable in a society that women enter public spaces without being veiled. In this case, civility itself cannot tell us whether a woman doing this anyway is owed a civil response or not unless it depends upon some capability to recognize a *display* of that which should be intolerable to all of us as mentioned before with racist remarks.

But, once again, recognizing a display of that which is intolerable must also imply some ability to distinguish between what is 'truly' intolerable and what is not by, for instance, judging that it is not truly intolerable to be unveiled as a woman. Recognizing that the opposite of morality appears thus also depends on some capability to distinguish between *what is truly moral and what is truly immoral* on a conception that does rely upon such a distinction as the one presented by Calhoun.

Therefore, such an idea of civility that can be somehow 'aware' of its internal limits or bounds is conceptually difficult and is not explained further by Calhoun, even though she claims that, for instance, the American columnist Judith Martin gives such civil advice about when we may be excused to behave uncivilly. But how can a capability to communicate attitudes that is different from critical reflection tell us when to stop using this capability and resort to other means? Does this not imply a critical point of view that may guide the practice of civility but is still, at least to Calhoun, different from the conformity at its very core? In other words, such a conception of civility does not provide a clear understanding of how we can conceive the boundaries of civility – and particularly not whatever we may designate as incivility – even though it does provide a meaningful approach to the contingency of civil norms. This must also be related to the fact that political conflict does not play any role in Calhoun's conception of civility since it is often through such contestation that our norms and their boundaries are both challenged and changed from a critical point of view. In this sense, it would also require that Calhoun's conception was developed further and perhaps reinterpreted for it to say something about the relation between ethics and politics. In the following section, I will therefore discuss other proposals for how to conceive the boundaries of civility and particularly examine the idea that civility can be conceived as *constitutively ambivalent* and thus also closer to incivility than it seems. In this regard, I will mostly focus on the conceptions of civility developed by Melanie White and Carole Gayet-Viaud since they both show convincingly that the value and thereby normative significance of civility does not need to be considered as being clearly settled in advance. It will be argued that this also makes it possible to question any neat separation between the 'goodness' of civility and the 'badness' of incivility, even though the selected theorists do not focus as much on the relation between the two.

5.2.   The ambivalence of (in)civility

Even though incivility is often not focused upon theoretically to the same degree that civility is (Edyvane, 2016, p. 352), the concept seems to be even more widespread in popular usage than its

counterpart such as when the 'uncivil' state of electoral debates is criticized. In this context, if civility develops through the relation between ethics and politics incivility might also do the same. According to Melanie White, civility is at least an inherently ambivalent and thus *double-sided phenomenon*, which can make it difficult to distinguish it from incivility. Drawing on the thoughts of Marc Augé, White distinguishes between *ambivalence* and *ambiguity* since 'ambiguity' is often interpreted as something that lies in between, or not clearly belongs to, two opposing qualities or judgments such as bad and good or true and false, while 'ambivalence' can be defined by the tension-full situation that it contains both qualities at once even while they oppose each other. To White, civility is ambivalent in this sense since it contains both the quality of maintaining and strengthening hierarchical distinctions through various social norms and oppositely the quality of limiting and restraining these distinctions, which White also calls a "pacification" of the powerful.

Thereby, White also contributes to the debate between supporters and critics of civility by not being either 'for' or 'against' civility but proposing that civility "reinforces distinctions at the same time that it seeks to ameliorate them" (White, 2006, p. 458).[37] This is only possible if it is the case that civility, at one and the same time, reflects *both* the hierarchical organization of power in society *and* restraints on the powerful, which can to some degree put the order of social distinctions into question. In other words, civility both reinforces social distinctions that benefit the already powerful and provides a space for the less powerful to question existing hierarchies by at least proving that they can also follow civil norms. To illustrate such a form of ambivalence, the exercise of self-restraint or what Mark Kingwell calls 'tact' usually implies amongst other things that we refrain to speak or act momentarily to let others express themselves in public debates. But this can function as both *an egalitarian expansion of politics* and as *an internalization of oppression*. Some individuals or groups can thus be required unjustifiably to exercise more self-restraint and tact in society than others. Given that such self-restraint also constitutes a part of what civility is, it can be said to be *simultaneously good and bad* from an emancipatory perspective that values equality.

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[37] In a similar manner, White also characterizes civility as a so-called "technology of citizenship" that both deploys techniques of distinction as well as pacification and self-restraint in her PhD dissertation *Dispositions of Good Citizenship: Character, Civility and the Politics of Virtue* from 2002. That is, such a doubled and split 'technology' consisting of both distinction and pacification can similarly at the same time exclude, for instance, marginalized groups in society as it can also include them in other ways. Because of this double-sided character, White characterizes civility as an "ambivalent technology that fosters an ambivalent politics" (White, 2003, p. 177).

White's idea, which is similar to Linda Zerilli's earlier discussed claim that civility can promote inclusion and exclusion at once, is that civility by itself is characterized by a persistent normative ambivalence between both 'good' and 'bad' qualities that cannot simply be distributed neatly between civility and incivility. In this sense, civility provides a space for both emancipation and oppression to develop. Even though this approach offers a promising way to conceive an internal dynamic of civility, it does raise the question of where this leaves the distinction between civility and incivility. Given that we still interpret incivility as *something worse than civility*, such an ambivalence must entail that civility cannot be as far away from incivility as we might think. Incivility can even be conceived as containing a similar normative ambivalence if being uncivil can at times counteract the oppressive aspects of civility by also questioning social distinctions.

It is important to underline that this is not the same as when, for instance, Andrew Fiala writes that "civility can be taken advantage of", which only implies that it is tragic how civility can fall into "unfortunate circumstances" by being used for wrong purposes (Fiala, 2013, p. 109). To White, civility is *constitutively* ambivalent and is not simply 'taken advantage of' since it does express unequal power relations that work against emancipation. This is rather similar to Christopher F. Zurn's conception of civility as an "ambiguous virtue" and an "illusionistic ideal" because it is, according to Zurn, both attractive as an ideal and empirically questionable (Zurn, 2013, pp. 358-359). This means that civility on Zurn's account is thus "a normatively important ideal that is simultaneously deserving of suspicion in the light of our knowledge of its strategic use" (p. 354). Both White and Zurn claim thereby that we cannot separate what we think of as normatively attractive from problematic aspects of civility such as the strategic exclusion of minority groups. To White and Zurn, the good and the bad of civility are *inherently connected to one another*. In this sense, they also position themselves in-between liberal and critical theoretical conceptions, proving that the choice is not simply between a liberal appraisal or a critical theoretical dismissal.

From this perspective, incivility might also be more intertwined with civility than the mere notion of being its opposite suggests. However, White's idea of civility being ambivalent does not provide clear answers to the complicated relationship between civility and its 'evil twin'. To her, civility is only ambivalent regarding its egalitarian and anti-egalitarian underpinnings but seemingly not when it comes to its linguistic double and, on appearance, its direct opposite. As the other theorists mentioned in this chapter so far, White does not focus on the relation between these two. However,

there must also be some conceptual implications for this relation from White and similar theorists' approach to conceptualizing civility. Incivility can only be placed outside as a 'mirror image' if civility is a both stable and coherent entity. But their relation becomes more intricate if what they both constitute is rather *unstable and incoherent*. From this perspective, it is not just that civility might also be oppressive but that it might be hard to distinguish from what should be its opposite.

One approach to this, which also provides a promising interpretation of the internal dynamic of civility, is the more pragmatic conception of civility that Carole Gayet-Viaud presents. According to Gayet-Viaud, "the current doxa about civility" that tends to equate it with a matter of merely applying rules and social codes obscures a pragmatic aspect of civility, which implies what she describes as an iterative process of constantly "testing" our ideas and norms. The main site of such an iterative process is the encounter with strangers in public life (Gayet-Viaud, 2016, p. 4). Gayet-Viaud interprets the 'current doxa' as marked by the influence of Erving Goffman, who analyzed behavior in public life from a "reductive functionalist perspective" in which it was presumed that strangers perform in a social context where so-called 'impression management' tends to play a greater role than moral concerns (pp. 15-16). A famous example of these performances is the norm of "civil inattention", which Goffman termed as the double standard whereby strangers both show mutual recognition whenever they cross each other's path through, for instance, brief eye contact and at the same time make sure to keep a certain distance to one another (Goffman, 2010, p. 304).

Gayet-Viaud contrasts this "Goffmanian" analysis of the public with an "Arendtian" approach where we interpret the public domain as also a place of free political action and where people can be concerned with *the more processual and 'impure' qualities of social life* and with incessantly redefining "what people owe one another, can expect from one another and can do together" (Gayet-Viaud, 2016, p. 4). We might also be wrong, or in this context uncivil, while doing so but at least the Arendtian approach interprets civility as *an ongoing experience* in which we repeatedly ask ourselves whether our norms can be further improved. The inclusion of such self-reflection in how we can practice civility as a pragmatic process also means that there is a broad range of possibilities for practicing civility right from more routinized and almost mechanical practices to a reflexive and critical engagement.[38] In this connection, Gayet-Viaud mentions ethnographic

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[38] Patrick Pharo has aptly designated *the broad middle-range sphere* of actions and practices that stand between these two outer poles, fully active engagement and fully routinized practices, as "civil interventions" (Pharo, 1985).

studies of stances towards beggars where it is shown that people often reflect on the 'right thing' to do and change their behavior repeatedly, which again affects their justifications for acting and their reflections. In this sense, *the continuous testing of our own norms* might at times show us that what we thought was a civil practice should rather be counted as the opposite – as being uncivil.[39]

Thus, Gayet-Viaud insists that civility cannot simply be equated with rule-following since it is a type of public action where norms are, at least sometimes, "open to criticism and suggestions for change" (Gayet-Viaud, 2017, p. 94). Gayet-Viaud does not explicitly thematize the role of political conflict in this regard, but it seems clear that civility thus implies both a self-reflexive ethics and the contestation of politics given that being 'open to criticism' also means that civility can become subject to political conflict. In other words, this implies that it can become part of the testing of our norms for behaving in the public that we engage in political conflicts on what is right or wrong behavior in public life. In this sense, such an account of civility as *an ethico-political learning experience* must also entail that we might at times be wrong and that one may have to start nearly all over again. 'Civil events' can even arise that more radically than the continuous testing of norms question the very frame of testing and thus our sense of what ultimately counts as *legitimate*, which is a concept that Gayet-Viaud describes as the "last criterion" for what civility is about (Gayet-Viaud, 2016, p. 12). Several of her examples to illustrate everyday civility also take place against the background of events that profoundly changed society such as the French Revolution.

A particularly interesting case is her anecdote from the aftermath of the terrorist attack on the Charlie Hebdo offices in January 2015 when there was held a big march of solidarity for the victims in Paris while the city was marked by an insecure and suspicious atmosphere. Gayet-Viaud writes that she went on a crowded train from Place de la Nation that day, and when it stopped at Pigalle the passengers could hear the usual announcement that warned people to beware of potential pickpockets. Right after this announcement, there burst a huge spontaneous laugh inside the carriage, which Gayet-Viaud interprets as a distinct "citizens' laughter". This laughter hinted

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[39] With a focus on French cities, Gayet-Viaud has also reviewed and discussed how 'incivilities' such as loitering, street peddling, and dumping of waste are being sanctioned and dealt with in practice by authorities. Even though she does not discuss whether something that is now perceived as uncivil could be reinterpreted as the opposite, Gayet-Viaud does suggest that uncivil conduct is not simply the breaking of rules in society just as civility is also not simply the following of those rules. According to Gayet-Viaud, incivilities "very often hightlight *inherent* difficulties in activities and situations" such as a lack of response and accountability from the authorities or an honest confusion about what the norms to follow in a specific context are (Gayet-Viaud, 2017, p. 94).

not only at the absurdity of watching out for pickpockets when compared to the terrorist attack but also, in a more unarticulated manner, at "what security was (really) about" and "the nature of the trust" that existed between these strangers crowded in a train together (p. 9). Even though the terrorist attacks in 2015 were clearly not civil, this example still points to the constant possibility that societally disruptive events might force us to reflect upon and perhaps alter our understanding of what we mean by civil norms about, for instance, having security and trust between strangers.

Without making any justification for terrorist attacks, events of a similar reach such as these can thus *shake (in)civility from within* and question its internal difference. The repeated emergence of particularly revolutionary events throughout history that make us reexamine the 'ground' of civility also questions any idea of civility progressing in a linear and gradual way. That is, civil events can shake civility to its core and *reorient our normative compass* in new ways. Thus, civility and incivility might become hard to distinguish and even 'change places' through both minor and major alterations in our normative practices. Simply put, what was civil yesterday might become uncivil tomorrow given that civil norms are not already established but keep developing in unpredictable ways. Civility is thus not just a 'ready-made package' of norms but a constant "work on norms" (p. 10). This is a more dynamic interpretation of civility that I will also draw inspiration from regarding the tension-full relation between ethics and politics through the following chapters.

But is incivility not at any given moment in such a process still the direct opposite of civility? As I will propose through the rest of this chapter, incivility cannot be everything that civility is not because they do share *some common ground* that provides the basis for opposing them to one another. This common ground is exactly that they are both located between ethics and politics. For instance, it might be both intuitively correct and unproblematic to designate a certain type of behavior in a public debate as rude and therefore uncivil. But, as I conceive civility, such behavior can only be characterized as uncivil because it is set within *a political context* in contrast to, for instance, some situations in families where it should rather be characterized as immoral. At the same time, to designate such behavior as uncivil also requires that it is set within *a moral context,* which implies that the action in question has moral significance. Usually, this implies that we can ascribe such behavior to a moral agent; one that we can expect to act otherwise, civilly, in contrast to an individual or collective that has not yet acquired, or lost at some point, this capacity. In both liberal and critical theoretical conceptions, that civility is posited within an ethico-political context

might be a less important background feature that does not by itself distinguish civility from similar concepts. But, as I will also argue later in the thesis, this is *an indispensable starting point* for a conception that interprets civility as something that is exactly about connecting ethics and politics.

In the following and last part of this chapter, it will be discussed whether it is possible to define and delimit the boundaries of such a common ground between civility and incivility. For this purpose, I am going to propose a conceptual distinction between incivility and what I will designate as 'acivility'. The idea behind this is that it is possible, at least to some degree, to distinguish between the opposite of civility within an ethico-political context and *that which is outside of such a context*. In other words, acivility is the opposite of civility and incivility at the same time. Even though there might be a considerable grey-zone between (in)civility and acivility, this distinction still highlights that the concepts of civility and incivility belong within the same ontological frame. To discuss this issue, I will particularly refer to the case of the so-called 'Muselmänner', a specific group of concentration camp prisoners within Auschwitz, as a historical example of acivility. This example is not meant to imply that acivility is always an oppressive state but, in contrast to perhaps most situations in contemporary society, the situation of Muselmänner in Auschwitz seems to be *a clearly identifiable state of acivility* where neither civility nor incivility could play any role.

5.3.   A zone of indistinction

From a commonsensical perspective, there obviously is something that does not directly involve or relate to civility – for instance, the activity of microorganisms or high-energy particles from the Sun – given that it is *not* an ontologically all-encompassing concept. As mentioned, my suggestion is that this should also make it possible to distinguish conceptually between (in)civility and what we can rather designate as *acivility*, where the latter refers to the idea of something that does not relate to civility in any meaningful way. In contrast to this notion, we can interpret incivility with the use of wordplay as 'in civility' in the sense of being *an internal negation* that remains within the same context as civility. As an ethico-political actor, you can be uncivil if you also, at least in principle, could act civilly. However, we must be aware that such a concept of acivility might be applied to stigmatize and discriminate against someone supposed to be neither civil nor uncivil, who has often been referred to in a colonial context under names such as 'the savage'. Such an acivil subject can even be thought to reside within our own society but without experiencing the reflective gap which normativity implies and that makes it possible to engage in both ethics and

politics – the indispensable gap between a sense of reality and a sense of what we 'ought' to do, as I have previously argued in the thesis.[40] Nonetheless, it seems difficult to dispense entirely with a categorization of certain parts of a population as acivil, at least on a temporary basis, given that the acivil subject is not just a deceptive category used for oppression. For instance, it hardly makes much sense to ascribe either civil or uncivil behavior to a newborn baby or a comatose patient since what they lack in their current state is *the capability to engage in ethico-political matters*.

Acivility can also emerge as a tragic product of, for instance, treating human beings consistently as subjects not even worthy of being designated as uncivil and thus submitting them to a type of radical exclusion. The situation of the so-called 'Muselmänner', as they were called in Auschwitz, who seemed to have become lost in a state of extreme degradation with no dignity or self-respect exemplifies such *a point of no return*. The ones who changed into 'walking corpses' in the accounts of many of the survivors from concentration camps under Nazi Germany were usually exposed to a period of severe starvation that merged life and death so close together that an outsider often could not even be sure whether a Muselmann was, in fact, dead or alive. In this sense, these acivil subjects were 'stuck' in this world with only minimal movement in mind and body left to offer.

The violence that they came to embody seems also to exemplify *a nearly incomprehensible state of acivility* where (in)civility could not play a role. The relation between ethics and politics that (in)civility can be said to rely upon and develop could not possibly exist in their limited world. In Giorgio Agamben's interpretation, the Muselmänner had lost any notion of the "good life" and were reduced instead to "bare life" within which merely living became the only norm that could be meaningfully followed. According to Agamben, ethics and humanity do not completely vanish in such a life without any dignity. There arises instead in the midst of this extremity another ethics that "begins where dignity ends" emerging from the awareness that life can nonetheless persist somehow in such degradation (Agamben, 1999, p. 69). But even if this is the case, it still seems that such a nearly unexplored "terra ethica", as Agamben characterizes such situations, points to *an acivil ethics* – that is, one with no possible connection to politics through, for instance, a relation

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[40] An example of such a subject is found in the famous movie *Forrest Gump* from 1994 with Tom Hanks in the lead role, who as a kind simpleton epitomizes the American 'just do it'-culture because he just participates in one societal change after another and often without any questions asked. In this regard, the problem is not that Gump lacks a benevolent and genuine attitude. Quite the opposite, it seems that Gump is an example of someone nearly *lacking any lack of genuineness* in the sense of being too genuine to reflect upon his own actions and what he ought to do.

between practicing responsibility for other human beings and the exercise of some form of political engagement together with fellow concentration camp prisoners to the extent that this is possible.

Primo Levi, probably the most famous of all Auschwitz survivors, recounts how one of the very few who survived the last Sonderkommando – the "special team" consisting of prisoners responsible for managing the gas chambers and crematoria – in Auschwitz, Miklos Nyszli, told that he took part in a soccer match between the SS and members of this very last team during a break. To Levi, this was definitely not the result of a brief moment of kindness or humanity showed by the SS. Quite the opposite, it was a mark of "infinite horror" and a "perfect and eternal cipher" of the grey-zone of extremities that the concentration camp enclosed upon them and, in a certain sense, *drilled into their souls* for the rest of their lives whether they survived the camp or not (Levi, 2009, p. 26). The point seems to be that the match, at least for Levi, became a magnifying glass for a certain meaninglessness residing within every appearance of meaning conveyed through the concentration camp's many routines, rituals, and codes. In this sense, it could only be acivil. Thereby, the match seemed to bind the perpetrators and victims together and turn every notion of justice into blurriness, which Agamben also calls a *zone of indistinction*. This was perhaps also the true crime of such seemingly egalitarian moments during the Holocaust: To make it much harder for the victims to recognize themselves as victims and find some way back to a sense of justice.

In this connection, acivility can also be characterized with this expression by Agamben as a 'zone of indistinction' between civility and incivility; the time and place where *such a difference cannot be made*. Acivility is the absence of (in)civility in either a momentary or more lasting state, where neither civility nor incivility plays a role as a normative practice and orientation marker. In some cases, acivility might exist in a more unproblematic manner, at least momentarily, such as when it is said that we can suspend both ethical and political considerations to immerse ourselves in a field of action by reaching a so-called 'flow state' with an energized focus on doing something. Acivility is not an unchangeable part of reality but can recurrently be both created and destroyed; arise and disappear again. If we operate with such a category, it also becomes too simple to claim that incivility is anything that civility is not or the other way around. Instead, these two concepts can be theorized as inherently connected by being formed continuously as 'positive' and 'negative' developments of the dynamic relation between ethics and politics. Whether we can distinguish between civility and incivility hinges upon whether we can also separate, at least to some degree,

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right and wrong or goodness and evil from each other. Given that it is often quite difficult to make such distinctions and that 'civil events' may occur, we ought to be careful when making the cut between what belongs to the sphere of civility and what belongs on the other side. The seeming recurrence of acivility in modern societies is, at least, a symptom of the constant possibility of situational breakdowns where *both civility and incivility cease to apply* in any meaningful sense.

Overall, the twists and turns that complicate the relation between incivility and civility as well as the constant possibility of situational breakdowns point toward what we might call a certain 'out-of-jointness' inherent to civility and incivility. Civility seems, in other words, to be *more impure and changeable* than at first sight. As the symptom of a breakdown or, at least, the absence of any difference between civility and incivility, 'acivility' also points to such a troubling perspective that civility and its boundaries might not be firmly grounded. But, as I will argue in the next chapters, this perspective can be developed further through a reconceptualization that interprets civility as an internally conflictual and potentially reflexive way of being and acting in a normative sense. For now, what both the category of acivility as well as the unstable boundaries between civility and incivility show us is that the relation between ethics and politics can be thought as *a defining feature* of what (in)civility is and how it is distinct from other practices that only belong to politics or ethics. A more thorough exploration of what this defining feature implies, which the following chapters undertake, can thus also provide a new way of understanding both civility and incivility.

As I pointed to in the first part of the thesis, it is possible to conceive civility as a more dynamic relation between ethics and politics. But how can we conceive civility as both changeable and yet something distinct; as both formal and substantial at the same time? The next chapter will focus more directly on this question of how change, and the lack thereof, can be theorized as part of what civility implies. In this regard, I will examine two prevalent approaches for conceiving civility that I call a *historicist* and a *universalist* approach. Through a discussion of two theorists representing each of these, it will be argued that both approaches can provide meaningful conceptions of civility for various purposes despite certain outstanding issues. However, neither approach considers whether internal conflict might be that which *constantly drives change*, which I will propose and argue is the most meaningful way for conceiving civility as a relation between ethics and politics.

6. The possibility of a third way

As the first part of the thesis showed, many if not most current conceptions of civility refer to something substantial or 'essential' that civility is about, even if it also develops in different forms. However, there seems to be particularly two prevalent ways of conceiving the internal constitution of civility and what the role of change might be in this connection. In this chapter, I will show how both these two ways can be fruitful for various purposes despite some challenges, but that a distinct third way is both possible and more relevant to conceptualize civility as a relation between ethics and politics. In short, the two prevalent ways differ from each other as to whether civility is conceived as being mainly *conditional* in its existence and constitution or instead as *unconditional* in the sense that what civility is about does not depend on any circumstances. I will interpret the first approach as *historicist* because if civility is conditional this usually means that it is a historical phenomenon that contingently arose, changes, and will inevitably disappear again. Oppositely, I will interpret the second approach as *universalist* because if civility is unconditional this usually means that it is a universal phenomenon that as already given 'enters into history' in the sense that its character always remains the same even if it does not exist anywhere and at all times. Just as with the previous distinction between political ethics and ethical politics, this analytical distinction cannot neatly classify every conception of civility, but one or the other of the two approaches is often most prevalent in conceptions such as the ones that are going to be discussed within this chapter. Regarding the liberal and critical theoretical conceptions analyzed in the first part of the thesis, it is, for instance, clear that liberal conceptions often refer to moral norms that are thought of as being unconditional in their meaning and value, while critical theoretical conceptions often refer to political developments that are thought to condition both the meaning and value of civility.

To further discuss and question these two approaches to conceive civility, I am going to analyze two specific conceptions in which respectively one and the other approach is particularly distinct. On this basis, the chapter will conclude by suggesting a possible third approach which is neither historicist nor universalist in the ordinary sense of these terms. What I will suggest is more precisely that it is most meaningful for our purpose to conceive of civility *as continuously changing through a persistent core of internal conflict*. In this sense, civility is historically conditioned by that which gives rise to and shapes such internal conflict, but its character as that which evolves through internal conflict is unconditional since that is what defines civility on this

account. It might be objected that this does not constitute a distinct third approach since it merely combines the two existing approaches in a similar manner as many conceptions of civility point to both formal aspects of civility that are conditioned by historical circumstances and a substantial meaning that remains unconditional. But, as I will argue later in this chapter, the reason why I still maintain that it can be considered as a 'third way' is, briefly put, that what is conditional and what is unconditional in the constant development of internal conflict cannot be entirely distinguished from each other. That is, even if we interpret internal conflict as unconditional for what civility is we cannot understand what internal conflict means without following how it continually develops through specific conditions. In this sense, the meaning of civility as *an internally conflictual practice* is only given within history understood as that which continually conditions its development, but that civility is internally conflictual can still be interpreted as a defining trait that, at least so far, seems to repeatedly emerge and persist throughout history without going 'beyond history'. Thereby, civility can be interpreted in a similar way as ethics and politics; as continuously dependent on shifting circumstances and yet a practice that is not limited to one historical context.

The two specific conceptions that will be discussed in the following sections have been presented and elaborated by, respectively, the sociologist Edward Shils and the philosopher Geneviève Souillac. In this regard, it is probably not a coincidence that Shils as a sociologist theorizes civility as a particular historical practice, while Souillac as a philosopher conceives of civility in more universalist terms. Shils is also a liberal theorist, while Souillac is inspired by parts of both liberalism and critical theory. However, the analysis of the two conceptions does not aim to show that either liberalism or critical theory necessarily follows one or the other of these two approaches. In contrast to liberal conceptions of civility as a more universalist political ethics, Shils will provide a clear example of how it is also possible to focus on civility as historically contingent with a liberal approach. And in contrast to critical theoretical conceptions of civility as a more historicist ethical politics, Souillac will provide a clear example of how it is also possible to conceive civility as a universal 'force' that assists instead of hinders us in opposing both inequality and domination.

Overall, the chapter is divided into three parts. In the first section, we will focus on the historicist approach through a discussion of Edward Shils' conception of civility. In this regard, it will be argued that, at least in Shils' conception, it becomes difficult to both delimit and evaluate civility as a historical phenomenon because the role of change is not entirely clear. In the second section, the universalist approach will be discussed with Geneviève Souillac's conception, which is a

political ethics that does seem to have a distinct universal character but whose normative status raises some unresolved questions. In the third section, I will present my approach which conceives internal conflict as a *driver of change* for civility as a dynamic relation between ethics and politics.

6.1.   Both fact and ideal

Even though many critical theorists are historicist in their critique of civility, a historical focus does not by itself entail skepticism toward civility since one may also consider it *a valuable historical achievement*. A clear example of the latter is the conception presented by Edward Shils who did focus on the developments throughout the centuries leading to what he called 'civil politics', which he particularly associates with the rise of liberal democracy in Western countries. According to Shils, "the modest flowering of civility in the modern world" is a new thing in history, which despite some forerunners amongst the ancient Greek and Roman societies has evolved through a halting and uneven development (Shils, 1972, p. 69). Writing mainly during the Cold War, Shils also believed that civil politics was under threat by what he called "ideological politics" defined as a type of politics that is obsessed with totality – and is thus a steppingstone into totalitarianism – coupled with *moral separatism* in which everyone who does not ascribe to the same doctrine is branded an enemy. Civility, civil politics, and civil society are characterized as being all the opposite of this in the sense that these imply compromise, self-restraint, and a general "acceptance of the limitations of human powers", whether one governs or is one of the governed in a polity (p. 64). Shils is therefore adamant in his view that civil politics does not arise automatically but must be nourished and practiced as a tradition that binds its actors to the past and upholds certain standards of judgment as well as rules of conduct as "sacred", which is understood in a more secular than religious sense. That is, the *tradition* of civility must not be accepted as an ideological doctrine on its own, but a civil society still needs a "largely unreflective acceptance of these rules of the game" that civility constitutes. It is this element of *unreflective acceptance* that he associates with a secular understanding of 'sacredness' (Shils, 1958b, p. 156).

Even though a tradition is a social matter, Shils characterizes civility as primarily an individual character trait as other theorists showed in previous chapters. It varies whether he uses words such as a "belief", a "virtue" or an "attitude", but the common element seems to be *a restrained appreciation and support of liberal democratic institutions and their authority* (Shils, 1980, pp. 528-529). Civil politics does recognize and value the pluralism of modern society with disagreeing

parties as well as conflicts of interests and ideals. But it is still an approach that emphasizes a need to maintain basic order in society. According to Shils, civility is "a virtue expressed in action on behalf of the whole society, on behalf of the good of all the members of the society to which public liberties and representative institutions are integral" (Shils, 1980, p. 529). From this perspective, Shils argues that even though ideological politics is about proposing ultimate solutions, which also cover the whole of society, it is ideology rather than civility that is both parochial and partisan. While ideology is about choosing sides in an ongoing conflict and thus distinguishing between 'friend' and 'enemy', civility is *the insistence on self-restraint* from both sides as well as a positive emphasis on what still binds the different parts of society together in a 'common good'. In this regard, Shils also claims that civility is not just on the side of those who possess authority and power in society since it also restrains the exercise of power and advocates widespread inclusion.[41]

At the same time, Shils stresses that there is *no clear line of demarcation* between civility and ideology. Civility and its reference to the common good also imply substantive values such as equality, liberty, and community. But these are pursued without the rigidity and exclusiveness that ideological politics implies. Without any reference to substantive values, the common good that civility is oriented toward becomes an empty shell while civility itself becomes an "ideology of pure politics" since what is left is merely the pursuit of power (Shils, 1972, p. 68). In this view, it is moral separatism, and not so much the values underneath, that is the problem with ideology. But Shils' conception seems thus also somewhat ambiguous in the sense that it can be described as an active concern for the common good – but *a concern that cannot become 'too concerned'* in order not to become ideological. The idea of the common good must not become a doctrine about the ultimate value for all of society. Shils varies his vocabulary in this regard by interchangeably describing civility as a concern for the "whole", "common good", or "common substance" of society (Shils, 1960, p. 353; 1978, p. 177; 1995, p. 5). But the ambiguity remains in the sense that civility is conceived as the engagement of a concerned citizen who is not just worried about how to uphold an already established good but also whether it really exists in the first place. As Shils

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[41] According to Richard Boyd, it is a misconception to label Shils' notion of civility as conservative, elitist, or authoritarian. It is true that civility as a task and perhaps also burden *falls primarily on the powerful*, but without the inclusion of the so-called 'peripheries' of society there is no common good that civility can rely upon. In Boyd's reading, some incivility from marginalized groups in the form of, for instance, disorderly and impolite protests is, to Shils, also welcome if this brings attention to exclusion and thus a lack of civil politics (Boyd, 2019, p. 148).

puts it, civility is not so much a belief in the common good as in "the possibility of the common good" – the existence of which the citizen is, ultimately, not entirely sure of (Shils, 1980, p. 528).

In this context, Shils distinguishes between two different kinds of civility of which it is only one of them that is called "substantive" – even though both are also defined as historical achievements. *Substantive civility* is the kind of civility that is essentially political in the sense that it binds individuals and society together. As already touched upon, substantive civility for Shils is the mode of political action that is oriented toward a common good; a moral unity between all members of society that binds even political antagonists together. But Shils recognizes another, and perhaps more moral than political, kind of civility that he equates with "civil manners" and courtesy, which makes social life generally more pleasant and respectful (p. 13). Shils is aware that 'good manners' can also be thought of as a more formal notion, which is why he couples this type of civility with an ethics of dignity and moral worth of all persons. According to Shils, these two kinds of civility are "interdependent" and contribute to one another in the sense that they both facilitate and regulate the interaction between different members of society. Even though Shils does not elaborate on the exact relation between the two, he does claim that substantive civility, or civil politics, always contains the exercise of civil manners; that the second is included in the first kind of civility. But, relating to previous discussions about the relation between ethics and politics implied by different conceptions of civility, the relation between these two kinds of civility is also presented as being remarkably static. It seems almost as if civil manners for Shils provides, at least when they play the role they should do, *a rock-solid foundation for civil politics* even if these manners must also have developed through the "halting and very imperfect" growth of civility (Shils, 1958a, p. 480).

Regardless, it seems to be true, as Julius Gould has claimed, that Shils' idea of civility can be interpreted as both "fact and ideal" because it is conceived as a historical product that has also become an ideal for everyone to strive for (Gould, 1998, p. 252). From this perspective, civility has developed unevenly throughout history but today it has become the case that no society can flourish without civility. As Stephen Turner points out in this regard, we should not be misled by Shils' references to Carl Schmitt's theory that antagonism and exclusion constitute an integral part of modern politics. That is, civility is to Shils also *antagonistic* in the sense that it actively promotes some forms of exclusion and is especially averse to what is called ideology. But from this perspective, civility and its historical role in liberal democracy consist of the right kind of

exclusions why it should not be replaced by other ethico-political practices, as Schmitt famously argued with his advocacy for a much more authoritarian political community. The civility of liberal democracy and its institutions is, according to Shils, the system to maintain (Turner, 1999, p. 139).

Shils' conception is, nevertheless, more fact than ideal since the possibility of a fully civil society is not considered in his writings. His 'ideal' in the sense of something imagined beyond the current situation is rather *more negative than positive* because the value of civility particularly relies upon an idea of what disastrous consequences would follow from its disappearance. Civil society as a concept does not either point to an ideal in the ordinary sense but is something inherently fragile and threatened by different ideological tendencies such as what Shils calls "antinomianism" conceived as an anarchistic hostility to any rules and laws whatever these may be (Shils, 1995, p. 27). This negative assessment of contemporary society might also explain why Shils does not elaborate any further on which kind of historical practice civility is since *the focus is elsewhere*. But without a more elaborate conception, the theoretical approach leaves several unresolved questions. First of all, Shils does not explore in-depth the relation between a formal civility of good manners and civility as a substantial mode of political action but simply claims that they are complementary to each other (Shils, 1991, p. 13). Secondly, Shils does not focus on how we have developed the sense of a common good in modern society and exactly what values this so-called 'substance' of civility might refer to. Shils could be right in his claim that any "unambiguous definition" of the common good is not attainable, but there must be a lot more to discuss regarding how we can theorize the common good (p. 16). Instead, Edward Shils focuses more on a critique of those tendencies in modern society which he perceives as *threatening the very basis of civility*.

Despite these unresolved questions, a more historicist approach such as the one presented by Shils can conceive civility as being historically conditioned in a meaningful way by, for instance, interpreting civility as a particular kind of political engagement in Western liberal democracies. This does not mean that there are not conceptual challenges which *specifically apply to a historicist approach* such as how to account for civility as a coherent historical phenomenon, if it is conceived as coherent, and what its normative status is as a 'product' of given conditions. In Shils' case, the question is particularly how we can account for the fact that civility does not pervade society as such but is often challenged and might also develop continuously in ways that could relate to a more dynamic relation between 'civil manners' and 'civil politics'. However, it still seems that a

historicist approach is badly equipped to conceive civility as a relation between ethics and politics as such given that the co-existence of ethics and politics arises in widely different historical contexts. At least, a focus on both the ontopolitical and the ontoethical meaning of civility goes beyond interpreting civility as one coherent historical practice. Just as ethics and politics are not practices that evolve in one single and continuous development over time, the relation between the two cannot either be conceived as such a coherent entity. Nevertheless, the historicist emphasis on *conditionality* as inherent to how civility arises and develops is still, as I will argue later in the chapter, relevant to the approach that I propose. With this in mind, we will now move over to focus on the universalist approach through a discussion of Geneviève Souillac's conception of civility.

6.2.   An immanent transcendence

A universalist approach to civility can just like the historicist approach take various shapes and sizes. What more universalist conceptions share is an emphasis on civility as something that is not historically contingent but 'essential'. It is possible to remain skeptical or critical of civility with a universalist approach but often civility is thus strived after as an ideal. Some approaches such as John Keane's more utopian idea of a 'fully civil society' might even be characterized as *civil idealism*. An elaborate conception of civility in which this approach plays a clear role has been developed by Geneviève Souillac in her theory of democratic ethics. In the following, I will first present such a democratic ethics and thereafter discuss the role that Souillac grants to civility within this ethico-political framework. To Souillac, democracy signifies primarily a normative notion of a public sphere that remains open to *a continuous reiteration of its norms*, whereby these norms can be both expanded and challenged through citizen engagement and deliberation (Souillac, 2012, p. 88). Because of this characterization of democracy as an iterative politics, democracy must also take place at the borders of any political community given that such borders are not firmly established but are rather privileged sites of change. To Souillac, democracy implies a certain 'cosmopolitanism' understood as a "project of mediations" in which this reiteration expands itself throughout time and space. As she and Douglas P. Fry argue, emancipation means *a constant movement of expansion* and thus a broadening gesture through particularly intercultural meetings, in which the "emancipatory civic experience" also becomes more far-reaching and inclusive (Souillac & Fry, 2015, p. 37). This is why Souillac counts sociability, hospitality, and non-violence as crucial elements in this democratic ethics since they facilitate such expansion.

In this connection, Souillac does not provide a single definition of civility as an inherent part of such a democratic ethics but notes that the concept is tied to both civil society and civilization as well as sociability and non-violence (p. 160). However, she utilizes the concept in a specific way that suggests a more concrete interpretation. That is, she repeatedly refers to the "forces of civility" and, at one time, to "the nonviolent power of civility" as something that as a form of *powerful current* keeps both civil society and democracy alive. Interestingly, Souillac also claims that civility is not an undiscovered utopian ideal but instead *a constitutive force*, which must entail that it somehow grounds or, at least, 'keeps the wheels' of this ethics turning (p. 152). In this sense, even though Souillac often refers to John Keane's conception of civil society their understandings of civility nonetheless differ. While Keane conceives civility as a regulative idea that guides our efforts and practices but cannot be reached completely, Souillac places it in another position that is more akin to a constitutive part of any democratic ethics which is *already there in the first place*.

Civility is therefore not quite the same as the final realization of the political ethics that Souillac advocates but is rather "those qualities and practices that civilize politics" by providing a means to transform conflict and violence as well as welcome complexity and uncertainty at the borders of politics (p. 191). Civility is not wholly transcendent or descends from above but rather arises from below to render the realization of democracy possible. However, this inevitably installs a minimal distance between civility and the concrete realization of, for instance, citizenship and human rights, which provides civility with *an almost mysterious quality* as attested by her use of words such as 'force' and 'power'. As Souillac also writes in this regard, civility is "historically and theoretically inscribed" into citizenship when one 'civilizes' politics (p. 181). As *an internal impulse* of democratic politics and as that which seems to be the most universal in Souillac' ethics, civility can be said to possess a quality of 'immanent transcendence' in the sense of constituting something inside of democracy which is not same as democracy but facilitates it. As a so-called 'inscription', civility retains the quality of being *slightly foreign* within the practice of politics.

Reading Souillac, we might also get the impression that civility is only one component in the continuous facilitation of democratic ethics. Other practices such as hospitality, memory, and recognition seem to play similar roles in the sense that they constitute in various ways what Souillac calls a "meta-language" on politics that makes the 'language' of democracy possible. For example, hospitality implies "features of the intersubjective encounter" that involve the

experiences of giving, promising, and forgiving, which engages us repeatedly with questions about community and justice (p. 190). In this sense, hospitality can also facilitate an expansion of democracy through, for instance, introducing newly arrived immigrants to one's political community and helping them to gain a voice in democratic discussions. However, this leaves the concept of civility in a tight spot that does not seem to be resolved by Souillac. Either we interpret civility as the wider term that covers all these so-called 'meta-linguistic' practices, qualities, and values or we conceive civility as rather something distinguished and thus different from, for instance, hospitality. Souillac does not provide a clear answer as to what might distinguish civility in this context, which is why these 'forces' of civility seem to become even more mysterious – as some undefinable ingredient that supplements it all at once. Civility could be thought of as a sort of universal 'energy' that keeps us moving toward democratic inclusion through the ways that it underlines practices such as hospitality, recognition, and non-violence, but this is not clearly stated.

Perhaps the above interpretation goes too far in its reading of Souillac's conception of civility as a nearly ahistorical category. Souillac also characterizes civility as a summarization of all "those practices which offer an antidote to violence", which seems to imply that these practices develop historically through the continuous attempt to 'civilize' politics (p. 152). For instance, if hospitality forms an integral part of civility as a democratic ethics, it must be the case that the meaning of hospitality itself also changes with developments as to who belongs to different communities throughout time and who the hosts and guests, as well as their relation to each other, are in the global circulation of people. As Souillac emphasizes, democracy is an unpredictable experience containing "destabilizing elements of surprise", which might apply as well to civility (p. 65). However, Souillac consistently describes civility as an available resource for democratic politics that can be "harnessed" to develop politics in a non-violent direction (p. 150; p. 189). Perhaps the underlying idea is to operate with an internal distinction within civility between its various practices that historically develop in unpredictable ways and the more ahistorical 'force' or 'power' that civility maintains no matter what democratic activity that expresses it. This can, for instance, be compared to Sune Lægaard's distinction between equality as civility's referent object and its varying cultural specificity. In both cases, there seems to be an internal split between different forms of civility and an underlying substance that it always refers to. But regardless of the exact interpretation, there is *a distinct universalist orientation* in Souillac's conception because civility is not itself described as conditioned but only as that which conditions democratic politics.

A universalist approach such as the one presented by Souillac shares certain similarities with a historicist approach regarding the difficult task of conceiving civility in a coherent manner. That is, both approaches tend to assume that civility is a clearly distinguishable entity, but both also struggle with delineating its exact features and distinguishing it from other categories. With Shils, this becomes particularly clear in the difficulties of pinpointing where exactly civility resides in modern society – and how civility bridges the divide between formality and substance – while in Souillac's case the problem is rather how to localize civility amongst multiple and interconnected ethical practices. Meanwhile, both Souillac and Shils face a problem with the normative status of civility but in slightly different ways. Opposite to Shils, who focuses more on the threats to civility than why it is that civility is valuable in the first place, there is no doubt to Souillac that civility is valuable on its own, but why that is the case becomes difficult to answer when civility is at least partly disconnected from both politics and ethical practices such as hospitality and recognition.

Once again, this does not mean that it is impossible to conceive civility meaningfully as something that is universal as, for instance, the existence of an absolute value that ought to guide politics. However, a universalist approach is as badly equipped as the historicist one to conceive civility as a relation between ethics and politics because such a relation is clearly *conditioned* by the co-existence of ethics and politics. In this sense, the relation between ethics and politics cannot remain the same over time if both ethics and politics change. This is perhaps also one of the reasons why Souillac's conception of civility as a political ethics faces several challenges because civility is, similar to the liberal conceptions by Teresa Bejan and Sune Lægaard, conceived as something that only seems to facilitate and regulate the constant changes of politics without being changed in turn. If civility is characterized as unchangeable, it will perhaps inevitably assume a mystical character. On this background, I will now present a third approach in the last section of the chapter. Such a 'third way' proposes that civility can be conceived as having a distinct character just as ethics and politics also have, which resembles a more universalist approach, but that this character is that it changes historically through internal conflict and thus lacks a coherent unity. In this sense, civility is 'unconditionally conditioned' through its internal dynamic. This means that change is part of what defines civility since *it continuously develops through its own conflictual tensions*. Such an approach to civility will be both applied and developed even further in the last chapter of the thesis.

6.3.   The lack of an elephant in the room

More universalist conceptions such as the one presented by Souillac seem to presuppose that there is an unchangeable core at the heart of what it means to be civil – even if this core is, at the same time, conceived as always being out of reach or only shows itself as a 'current', a constitutive but universal force. As a response to this, a historicist might attempt to show that what civility implies is contingent upon historical circumstances but, as with Shils, the historicist approach nevertheless also tends to presuppose that civility constitutes *an already established and coherent entity*. In this connection, Stephen Carter uses an analogy with blind men standing around an elephant and feeling various parts of it, which leads them to conclude that they are standing in front of different animals instead of feeling different parts of the same animal. Similarly, Carter claims that all the various views on civility are each "partially correct" because they show us complementary parts of a greater whole (Carter, 1998, p. 11). But this analogy hinges on an underlying idea that there is one whole elephant to be found, or at least thought of ideally, behind all the partial perspectives. But what if such an elephant does not even exist? In the following, I will at least argue that a conception of civility does not necessarily need to point toward a whole and discernable entity, an 'elephant', but that it can also meaningfully refer to *a more dynamic and less coherent process*.

In other words, what I suggest is that internal conflict and thus a lack of internal unity can also be conceived as a defining characteristic of civility, even though it develops throughout history. This does not need to entail that such internal conflict is always provoked by the same type of opposition or tension. As argued in previous chapters, the relations between public and private life as well as between individual and society produce considerable internal conflict that evolves civility today, but they do not necessarily play this role in its development. Similarly, the tensions between *an active engagement* and *a passive regimentation* regarding, for instance, the question of legislation mainly seem to emerge as dimensions of civility when we interpret it in relation to ideals and practices connected to citizenship. An ideal of, for instance, civil society does not need to focus on whether citizens should participate actively in specific organizations if civility is rather thought to imply *a widespread diffusion of values* throughout both individuals and groups, who are neither active nor passive in that respect. Neither does it need to matter much for the meaning of civil disobedience whether civil disobedient actors show a committed engagement or rather do so in a more passive and non-committed manner such as in mass demonstrations that do not require as

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much for each individual. This can also be related to the previous critique of conceptions of civil disobedience that contain a narrow limitation of the actors to collectives and not to individuals. In this sense, the internal conflict of civility *evolves through shifting circumstances*, which might, for instance, include tensions between collectives and individuals but it does not necessarily do so.

Such an emphasis on internal conflict also implies that we become more attentive to not only the evolving constellation of 'elements' that constitute civility but also what we might call *an ensemble of gaps* between these elements. These gaps between the conflicting parts of civility prevent civility from being fully consistent because they are those sites of tension which constantly develop civility in new ways. Simply put, without any of such gaps and thus also inconsistencies civility would oppositely constitute a consistent whole with all parts fitting together. In this regard, it is important to distinguish such a conception of civility *as inherently inconsistent* from another idea claiming that there only exist so-called 'family resemblances' between various uses of civility as a concept. The point is not that our use of the concept is itself an ensemble of gaps, even though this also seems to be true. It is instead that its various meanings make it possible to interpret civility as both a set of elements *and* the tension-full differences between them. Such an ensemble of gaps points also to a reflexive potential of civility since, as I will argue more fully later in the thesis, this evolving internal conflict at least tends to make us reflect upon our own practices. In this way, we do not need to assume that civility constitutes an internally consistent entity, which Shils' idea of 'civil politics' and Souillac's notion of a democratic 'force' seem to. Instead, we can interpret certain conflicts about, for instance, what the common good is as being *inherent to civility itself*.

This does not exclude that more intuitive conceptions of civility as, for instance, an established ethics of politeness are also relevant and useful in other contexts. But civility must contain *its own internal movement* if it is to capture a dynamic relation between ethics and politics, and internal conflict as such a continuous movement can capture the both tension-full and open-ended aspects of this relation that I already pointed to in the methodological chapter. Since 'civility' is itself a contested concept, it also does not seem to be such a counterintuitive approach to conceive that which the concept points to as something which is inherently conflictual. In this connection, we can even pose the question of whether what is often perceived as a never-ending and unproductive discussion between 'civilitarians' and skeptics of civility not just reflects some degraded state of contemporary society but also points to *an incompleteness of civility itself*. In a certain sense, most

conceptions of civility do point in this direction by, for instance, granting that civil norms are changeable. Intuitively, we might presuppose that the continuous debate about the value of civility, or a lack thereof, is an expression that theorists have simply not found the right answer to this question yet, at least not collectively. But the former question highlights the possibility that such a debate might also reflect, at least partly, that what we often refer to as civility is itself *an open question as to its own value* due to an evolving internal conflict between opposing perspectives.

At this point, the question might be raised whether such a third way of conceptualizing civility expresses a *deconstructive* approach to the theoretical discussions on the concept. Of course, this entirely depends on the meaning that we ascribe to 'deconstruction' as a contentious term. For instance, is it merely a reading strategy for primarily philosophical texts or is deconstruction a theory on its own? At least in one sense proposed by Jacques Derrida, deconstruction as a practice implies what he calls an "unconditional rationalism", which means that one persists in "criticizing unconditionally all conditionalities" including one's own presuppositions through an ongoing practice of reflection (Derrida, 2005, p. 142). Being critical toward 'conditionalities' as what we perceive as foundational in one way or the other often entails a focus on tensions and change beneath an appearance of something as static and consistent. From this perspective, the critical discussions in the first part of the thesis about whether civility implies a distinct set of norms as its substantial core does contain *a deconstructive aspect*. However, the purpose is not to remain with such a deconstruction but to develop a reconceptualization that is not itself deconstructive since the emergence of internal conflict is now proposed as being the main *condition* for civility to exist.

Deconstruction as a theoretical approach often also involves a claim about there being *limits to reason* that remain undefinable but are exactly the source of constant tension within both theoretical and practical endeavors. With an expression applied by Lasse Thomassen in a deconstructive reflection on civil disobedience, such a claim points to the existence of a "non-rationalizable kernel" that is located at the center of a certain practice or phenomenon such as gift-giving and democracy, which Derrida famously discussed throughout his authorship (Thomassen, 2007, p. 212). In this connection, such a non-rationalizable kernel is usually interpreted as that which appears to us as a paradox or so-called 'aporia' arising from *a coincidence of opposites*; a contradiction between what we perceive as the conditions of possibility of something and that which limits the same thing, its 'conditions of impossibility'. For instance, the concept of

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antagonism is at times interpreted as a condition of possibility for politics that simultaneously marks its limit and makes it in another sense impossible to exist (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 122).[42] Thus, deconstruction can posit the existence of something that is constitutively non-rationalizable. However, the proposed approach to conceptualize civility in this context is not deconstructive in that sense. Internal conflict conceived as a condition of possibility for civility only constitutes an 'aporetic limit', a condition of impossibility, to the realization of civility at the same time if we assume that it is a constitutive part of civility that it contains *a promise of resolving conflict*. But such a promise, or perhaps 'echo', of something unresolved is not necessary to assume and, at least to some extent, an arbitrary limitation of the open-ended process that is the relation between ethics and politics. Simply put, civility conceived as internally conflictual does not necessarily 'call to be resolved', even though conflict is often something disturbing which we prefer not to engage in. As I will also focus on in the last chapter, those engaged in civility might usually strive for the conflict to be resolved and disappear again but civility by itself does not imply such an aspiration.

In the following chapter, we will shift focus from the broad contours of the reconceptualization of civility, which I have developed so far regarding both the ethico-political context as its external boundaries and conflict as its internal constitution, over to the question of how to develop a clear ontological conception of civility. In this regard, I will present and draw inspiration from Étienne Balibar's conception of civility, even though it only posits civility within a political framework. I will particularly focus on *transformation* as a concept inherently connected to civility as well as the idea of civility being what Balibar calls a 'metapolitics', which I will complement with the notion of 'metaethics'. As mentioned before, the reason for dedicating a whole chapter to Balibar's far-reaching conception is that it can be discussed as what seems to be *the most elaborate example of a clear ontological interpretation of civility*. It seems even to be the only case amongst the many different approaches to civility discussed in this thesis that posits civility within an ontological frame of either ethics or politics as such. In this sense, Balibar's conception comes closest to what I call a 'civil ontology' by interpreting civility as a central concept of political ontology together with two other concepts, emancipation and transformation. Another reason why it is presented and

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[42] In relation to the focus on both ethics and politics in this thesis, it is also possible to claim that ethics contains, or even constitutes, a similar non-rationalizable kernel. For instance, a core claim of what Simon Critchley characterizes as an "ethics of deconstruction" is that ethics is something unnameable and undecidable that, with a deliberatively paradoxical formulation, must be "comprehended in its *incomprehensibility*" (Critchley, 1997, p. 99).

discussed at this point instead of earlier such as within the first part of the thesis is also that I will repeatedly draw upon the arguments and perspectives developed in the preceding chapters. For instance, the discussion on the connection between transformation and civility in Balibar's writings will also refer to the role of change regarding civility that has been discussed within this chapter. In this sense, the positioning of the following chapter reflects its importance in the thesis as a steppingstone in the development of a new civil ontology through a reconceptualization of civility.

7. An ontopolitical conception

In this chapter, Balibar's conception will be presented and discussed in-depth as an elaborate example of how to theorize civility within an ontological frame. Overall, the chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, Balibar's broader political ontology is introduced with a specific focus on emancipation and transformation as what Balibar himself describes as two key concepts. In the second section, civility as *a third key concept of politics* is interpreted through the central notions of 'the other scene' as well as 'politics of politics', while the relation between civility and the two other concepts will be discussed as well. In the third section, I will finally argue that civility conceived as part of a broader political ontology does not capture a clear relation between politics and ethics as such, even though it provides a convincing perspective on *the changing boundaries of politics* and how to engage in the continuous reconstruction of such boundaries. In this third and final section, I will also argue that the conceptual distinction between transformation and civility makes it more difficult to conceive civility as a changeable practice, which it must be given that it develops in different forms through a so-called 'art of politics'. All of this will lead to the conclusion that there are particularly *two lessons to be drawn* from Balibar's ontopolitical conception, which is that it is important from an ontological perspective that broadens the scope of civility as a concept to focus on 1) The *connections* between civility and neighboring parts of the larger context in which it exists such as emancipation and transformation in Balibar's conception and 2) The *boundaries* of not only civility itself but also that which civility connects to since the boundaries of, for instance, politics can both change civility and be changed by civility.

7.1. Modalities of politics

According to Balibar, civility is certainly an ambiguous term but still relevant and important today exactly because of its "dual relationship" with both citizenship as its political side and moral norms in the broadest sense possible (Balibar, 2002, p. 39). That is, such a relationship and the tension it carries is not as prevalent in its conceptual alternatives such as 'politeness' and 'civilization' of which the last one is furthermore still associated with a division between the civilized and the barbarians. In particular, Balibar claims that civility does not necessarily entail an idea of suppression of all violence and conflict (Balibar, 2001, p. 15). But what is it that civility as a concept can show us; what makes it so relevant? To Balibar, the main point is that it shows us what it means *to fight for politics and against violence inside the same field of action.* In this first

section, I will begin by focusing on the overall relation between violence and politics that sets the stage for Balibar's political ontology and thereafter outline emancipation and transformation as two central concepts of politics before discussing in-depth the role of civility in the next section.

Sometimes, we think of political action and violence as mutually exclusive or consider politics as not belonging to the same category as, for instance, warfare even though they might imply similar means. Balibar's conception of civility does not equate politics and violence but rather places them on *a fractured plane of immanence* that cannot be separated into different worlds. From this perspective, there is a politics of civility because of the ever-insistent presence of a *violence of politics* that threatens politics from within. Civility relates to an inseparability between violence and politics, a 'vio-politics' or 'poli-violence', and yet also a tension-filled incompatibility. According to Balibar, it is both misleading and falsely moralizing to posit all violence at the limit and as an "object of blanket condemnation" (Balibar, 2015, p. 130). Rather, violence is a basic part of human experience and is thus connected to both morality, aesthetics, and politics. But, to Balibar, the existence of politics becomes at stake when violence tends to annihilate nearly all possibility of resistance, place death as close as possible to life – to the degree that life may seem harder than death to the victims – and in a self-spiraling way exceed the meanings and the functions to which it was bound at first (pp. 133-135). These are all characteristics of what Balibar describes as 'extreme violence'*,* which in its various forms can make politics itself impossible to practice.

As Remy Yi Siang Low points out, Balibar does not present any comprehensive theory of violence and barely ventures into the philosophical discussions about particularly the definition of violence that have taken place over many years (Low, 2019, p. 641). Instead, Balibar offers an internal distinction between two types of violence, which almost seems to split violence itself in two. The *first type* follows a pattern of conversion in which the destructive force of violence through historical developments also becomes a "productive force" that can be sublimated into an internal energy of political life. To Balibar, this transformation is illustrated in a helpful way by the German word "Gewalt" that implies such a dynamic where brute force turns into authority without getting rid of the problematic intertwinement of power and violence (Balibar, 2015, p. 34). In this sense, "Gewalt" is both a destructive and a constructive force. However, Balibar's hypothesis is that there repeatedly arises a *second type of violence* throughout history which constitutes an "inconvertible remainder" consisting of the forms of violence that resist any meaningful interpretation as to why

they happen. In this regard, such a 'remainder' also points to a certain threshold demarcating that which is extreme in the sense of being at the outermost limit of human societies and their developments. Extreme violence is *that type of violence which cannot be converted by politics*.

On this conception, civility is therefore about making room for politics in a world that is always threatened by violence. But what is 'politics' to Balibar? In an influential essay from 2002, *Three Concepts of Politics: Emancipation, Transformation, Civility*, Balibar distinguishes between three so-called 'modalities' of politics without providing a definition of politics as such. In the following, I will first present emancipation and thereafter transformation. Balibar proposes that emancipation should be conceived as the "ethical figure" and thereby also normative horizon of what he calls "the autonomy of politics". Emancipation as a sort of internal movement of political life is what Balibar describes as *the essential activity of politics*. By such a statement, Balibar does not mean to posit a teleological force at play that reduces all else in politics to a question of emancipatory progress. Following a long tradition of thinkers who distinguish in various ways between 'politics' and 'the political' as two different categories, Balibar seems to claim that *the political*, particularly in ordinary language, does not imply such an 'ethical figure' regarding the common-sensical associations of institutional figurations, power struggles, and disagreement that many of us associate with political developments. But, at the bottom line, all of this cannot obliterate the essential activity that, according to Balibar, *politics* is about because it provides the normative horizon for the political, even if this horizon might not always be clearly visible.[43] In this sense, Balibar adds a clearly normative component to his conception of politics, which means that politics as an organized space of conflict *has a purpose*. Even if it is at times only to a minimal degree in the face of significant obstacles and adversaries, politics is thus inherently emancipatory.

In addition, Balibar claims that emancipation also points to *a universalism* that is always at stake in politics because politics as such cannot exist without this essential form of activity that works to hinder subjection to authority and discrimination. From this perspective, 'the autonomy of politics' is neither institutions nor identifications, neither conflict nor consensus, but something that universally persists and develops through the interplay of all these historical categories. As an

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[43] It is worth noting that Balibar's distinction, at least in his English publications, alo seems to be opposite to how other theorists such as Chantal Mouffe reserve the adjectival form, 'the political', for an allegedly more essential, normative, and ontological side to 'politics' that rather implies shifting circumstances (Mouffe, 2005). Without being able to explore this question further, this might reflect linguistic differences between French and English.

interpretation of what it is that emancipation at least means today, Balibar most often points to the portmanteau word *equaliberty* (a combination of 'equality' and 'liberty') that he has proposed. To Balibar, equaliberty is a modern invention but, nevertheless, it also seems to constitute an "unconditional truth" for our age in the form of a doubled negation: There can be no equality without liberty and no liberty without equality (Balibar, 1994, p. 47). In this regard, emancipation must also be understood as *self-emancipation* since it always unfolds in an immanent manner. The autonomy of politics implies an "ethics of immanence" because emancipation cannot be granted from above but can only be realized by and through actors who emancipate themselves (Balibar, 2010, p. 118). In other words, emancipation as that which is universal in politics only develops its meaning and significance through a historically situated process of striving for equality and liberty.

The second modality of politics is defined as "the heteronomy of politics", which is similarly interpreted through a single concept, namely transformation (Balibar, 2002, pp. 8-9). Balibar suggests with this concept that politics is always a so-called 'politics-under-conditions', which cannot but change because there is, to Balibar, a clear connection between conditions and transformations. Being conditioned also entails that something is, at least potentially, subject to change. This is particularly inspired by Karl Marx for whom there was ultimately no politics *except under determinate conditions*. But the important point regarding a category of the heteronomy of politics is not only that there are always constitutive conditions of politics but also that it is the unpredictable changes of these conditions that turn them into conditions of politics and not of something else. Politics implies in Balibar's own words "change within change", which also makes it difficult to separate its 'autonomy' from its 'heteronomy' or its inside from its outside (p. 12). 'Change within change' means that changes within politics never run a straight course since there are always more changes affecting each other in political developments. With this complication in mind, it is also easier to understand Balibar's paradoxical statement that it is *the 'non-political' conditions of politics which are eminently political*. Politics changes itself outside of itself in the sense that part of what constitutes politics is that it also constantly responds to external changes.

In our context, this concept of transformation particularly relates to the earlier discussion with Carole Gayet-Viaud about the potential limits of civility conceived as a pragmatic testing of norms amongst strangers in public life. To Balibar, transformation sets certain limits to politics through its changing conditions, but the troubling question that Balibar furthermore poses is whether there

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might even be certain limits to the process of transformation itself. In other words, what if transformation stops at some point or does not cover someone or something that 'really' matters? How can we be sure that, for instance, a political conflict is not caught up in a vicious circle that cannot be transformed? The political actor may also not be sure how much it is possible to change one's standards and behavior if these constitute a so-called 'second nature'. According to Balibar, we cannot just solve these questions with a pragmatic approach or a belief in the possibility that what I have called civil events might transform our current practices and norms to the better. Transformation seems to be irreversibly tainted by the thought that *it might not do the whole job*.

It is presumably questions such as those above that led Balibar to claim that civility can be proposed and interpreted as a third modality of politics. Balibar claims that civility has to do with a so-called 'heteronomy of heteronomy' or what he also calls an "essential heteronomy of politics" (Balibar, 2002, pp. 1-2). But what makes civility to Balibar more 'essential' than transformation? What does such a concept do exactly and why is it placed, as we will see, at the outer limits of politics? In this regard, the following section will focus upon the crucial idea of *the other scene of politics* and discuss what Balibar means when he characterizes civility as being both about antiviolence and *a multifaceted art of politics* that always comes in various forms and shapes. Balibar's differentiation between antiviolence, non-violence, and counterviolence is also going to be analyzed since it is essential to understand what is distinct about antiviolence and thus civility.

7.2.   Balancing on the other scene

So, according to Balibar, we cannot just rely on a distinction between the autonomy and the heteronomy of politics, which leads him to introduce a third category that cannot be reduced to either one of the two. This category is, at first, described a bit cryptically as a "heteronomy of the heteronomy of politics". However, it is important to note that such a conceptual doubling is not just a way of saying that the conditions of politics also rely on conditions themselves and so on. It is rather an attempt to formulate an idea about there being certain 'un-conditions' amid these conditions in the sense of *a persistent knot of tension* at the center of what makes politics possible. In other words, there seems to a tension between the ground of politics and that which shakes and troubles the ground from within. That the heteronomy of politics understood as its shifting conditions is itself characterized by heteronomy presumably means in this context that these conditions are inherently unstable. In this sense, the transformation of politics must be a rather

unpredictable process. Balibar characterizes this aspect as "the other scene" of politics inspired by Sigmund Freud's use of the other scene as a metaphor to describe an internal 'otherness' of psychic processes. Thus, the other scene points to *the relation between politics and its never stable conditions*, which also explains Balibar's phrase that the other scene of politics is always also the scene of the other (p. xiii). That is, *the other* can be conceived as the one who balances fragilely at the limits of the political arena that we share; a 'personification' of the unstable ground of politics that can determine the fate of concrete individuals and groups. The foreigner within a bounded community is, of course, the clearest example of this because of her precarious condition – both formally and regarding the more informal recognition of being a member of society as, for instance, a refugee with a temporary permit or, even more precariously, as an illegal immigrant.

To illustrate this other scene, let us briefly turn to a literary example. In Orhan Pamuk's *Snow* (2002) we follow Ka, a poet returned from exile in Germany to report on a series of suicides in an isolated Anatolian city. During a snowstorm that cuts the city off entirely, a theatrical troupe stages a real military coup in the name of Kemalist secular values and as a reaction to both rising Islamism and Kurdish separatism. However, the coup can only last so long as the snowstorm and at the end the troupe and its leader, Sunay Zaim, prepare a play at the local theatre where it is announced beforehand in the newspaper that Zaim will be killed on stage. The audience does not believe that this will happen but, to everyone's surprise, the pistol used on stage does contain bullets and Zaim, therefore, dies as an act that is probably meant by Zaim himself to be a revolutionary sacrifice – a type of *convertible violence* transforming both the arts and politics of Turkey. However, it rather produces a state of shock and confusion in the city which, amongst other things, leads his wife and 'companion in crime' to a nervous breakdown and hospitalization. Later, the same wife only speaks of Zaim's death as an "accident at work", and the coup becomes characterized more and more by the people in the city as a "weird theatre event" rather than something truly revolutionary. However, this is not because what happens in the theatre is pure fiction since real power struggles and murders take place there. Rather, the theatre as the 'other scene' of the coup seems, in a certain sense, *too real* for a politics of transformation by questioning both the role of the revolutionary subject, living or dead, and what it takes to make an effective change in such a complex situation full of tensions. Not only does it question how to seize the moment when it might be opportune. It also becomes possible to reflect upon what it even means to engage with politics in the first place.

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Pamuk's novel thus shows that there is *nothing straightforward* about the other scene of politics – not even when the setting for this specific modality of politics is quite literally a theatrical scene.

To Balibar, it is on this other scene of politics that civility emerges and counteracts particularly extreme violence. As an overall interpretation of what civility implies, Balibar therefore defines civility as *a politics in the second degree* – a "politics of politics" or "meta-politics" that is about creating, evolving, and defending the conditions for how politics develops through both institutions and identities. Civility implies thereby a struggle for what Balibar seems to describe as *the two ultimate components of politics*, institutions and identities, even though each of these must necessarily be conceived of as always existing in the plural through various manifestations. Simply put, there can be no ultimate identity or institution of politics since this would imply a conception of politics as not being conditioned. But can transformation not also be described as such a struggle? Yes, but not in the sense of being concerned with the very existence of political practices; a concern that implies an "internal response or displacement" of violence, which Balibar also defines as *antiviolence* (Balibar, 2015, p. 22). To Balibar, antiviolence is civility in action.

Antiviolence is distinguished by Balibar as being different from two other but both wrong responses to the problem of violence in politics designated as "counter-violence" and "non-violence". *Counter-violence* is defined as the approach in which we reduplicate violence to fight evil with evil, as the famous idiom says, and ultimately convert our own violence into a better society. But, according to Balibar, any such attempt of conversion by 'homeopathy', of treating the same with the same, tends to lead to an inversion in which violence simply changes its course. The latter, *non-violence*, is characterized as the opposite cure of treating the same with radical difference as a pacifist stance but, at least according to Balibar's critique, the radicality of such a position also tends to entail an indifference to the unavoidable presence of violence. Through its passive way of being, non-violence constitutes thus an "abstraction" of violence which, as Balibar quotes Jacques Derrida, can in fact constitute and perpetuate the "worst kind of violence" (p. 1).

Such a 'violent' abstraction of violence, therefore, seems to imply that by being non-violent you simply ignore that violence happens – whereby indifference comes to mean at least some degree of acceptance and co-responsibility. It might be questionable whether a passive attitude is always also a violent act and whether it really is the 'worst kind of violence', but it seems clear that there is a normative difference at play regarding the distinction between counter-violence and non-

violence as categories, which makes non-violence *the worst of these two* in a fundamental sense. That is, at the least counter-violence attempts to convert and thus also diminish violence by confronting it head-on. There is to be found in the idea of counter-violence an endeavor to both confront and convert violence, even though this may be done with brutal and even more violent means that end up reproducing more and more violence in a vicious circle, which is a well-known phenomenon in, for instance, confrontations between police forces and protestors. To Balibar, the sovereign state that aims in this regard to monopolize the use of force "never ceases to concentrate the uncertainty or duality of justice and violence, of war and peace, in its very core" (Balibar, 2015, p. 32). But, contrary to this perhaps unresolvable issue within counterviolence, non-violence rather tends to passively *let violence run its own spiraling course* – whatever the consequences might be.

Such a characterization of non-violence also shares points of resemblance with the critique of civility as a communicative 'style' that, particularly in David Theo Goldberg's analysis, displaces the exercise of brutal violence as being out of our sight. In this sense, the practice of non-violence might also be described as *the dark side of civility*, even though Balibar explicitly claims that it is not an example of civility at all. Whether Balibar's critique also gives a correct description of the political practice that is usually called 'non-violence' today is, as Remy Yi Siang Low puts it, "certainly arguable" given many nuanced accounts of what so-called 'nonviolent direct action' is about (Low, 2019, p. 644). Balibar does not direct any critique toward such accounts but exclusively focuses on providing meaningful conceptual distinctions. But unfortunately, his choice of words has evidently confused a lot of his readers as to what is then meant by 'non-violence'.

It does not seem that Balibar's conception of civility has confused readers in the same way, but Balibar still does not want to exclude the possibility that he will "eventually have to supplement or replace it with other terms" (Balibar, 2015, p. 22). In the first of the Wellek Library Lectures where Balibar introduces the concept of civility, he even considers whether civility is a "terribly restrictive answer" to violence and politics in the form of arbitrary constraints and rules – a worry that he shares with many sceptics of civility as we saw in the first part of the dissertation (Balibar, 2015, pp. 22-23). Nevertheless, at the same time he also underlines that the conceptual history of civility has provided metamorphoses, malleability, and possibilities of variation between different ways of practicing civility – between particularly the public sphere of citizenship and civic-mindedness, on one hand, and the private sphere of politeness and sociability on the other hand.

However, the risk seems to remain that civility can be interpreted as only being a fixed system of politics that turns antiviolence into *an external framework of unquestionable rules* to be followed.

But, for now at least, civility is still defined by Balibar as this third response to violence that furthermore must change between various forms, which Balibar calls both "strategies" and "languages", depending on the possibilities for how to practice a so-called 'art of politics' at a given moment (Balibar, 2002, p. 35).[44] In this sense, Balibar's idea of civility also relates to earlier analyzed conceptions of both civil society and civil disobedience in which the idea of resisting violence plays a crucial role. But contrary to, for instance, John Keane's idea of a fully civil society as an ideal society without any violence, Balibar's starting point is a tragic one implying that violence cannot disappear once-and-for-all and that an idealization of civility without violence remains *an abstraction from violence*. Contrary to, for instance, Robin Celikates' characteristic of violence as a category up for negotiation and not a part of what civil disobedience itself implies, Balibar also insists upon the just as tragic idea that violence is irreducibly connected to the normative core of civil disobedience in the sense of what it must resist. Civility is therefore a *metapolitical effort to develop and defend politics against the use of violence within politics*.

The following and last section of this chapter will put focus on how Balibar's interpretation of civility provides not only a meaningful conceptualization but also contributes with a broad ontological perspective on politics as such, which we can draw inspiration from for a conceptual exploration of the relation between ethics and politics. However, I will at the same time argue that despite its relevance for this thesis Balibar's conception is still limited by his focus on politics and that the relation between transformation and civility, and thereby the role of change, is unclear.

7.3.   Connections and boundaries

According to James D. Ingram, Balibar was asked at the New School for Social Research in 2007 whether his conception of civility could be compared to John Rawls' idea of an overlapping

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[44] Inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Balibar designates *two main forms* of civility today as "becoming-minoritarian" and "becoming-majoritarian" regarding whether we privilege, respectively, disidentification over identification or the opposite. Balibar also discusses a third "hegemonic strategy" through a reading of G. W. F. Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820). This strategy is characterized as *hegemonic* since it consolidates politics through a hierarchical system or what Balibar also calls "processes of normalization" (Balibar, 2015, p. 116). However, it is questionable whether such a Hegelian politics should even be called a strategy of civility since it, opposite to the other strategies, does not attempt to open any political space 'from below'. In this sense, the hegemonic strategy seems to exclude emancipation and thus also politics in Balibar's own conception.

consensus that distinguishes between political and non-political, or reasonable and unreasonable, values within a given political community – to which Balibar's response was the following:

"I see a difference in principle between the fact of setting conditions (which are basically moral) for the agreement on citizens on 'political values' isolated from 'non-political values' within a closed polity and the fact of looking for the 'civil' norms of conflictuality (or dissensus) within an open space, where the limit between the 'political' and the 'non-political' is not agreed on in advance" (Ingram, 2015, p. 233).

In other words, Balibar conceives politics as an open space that is *both porous and dependent* in its very constitution on struggles and the continuous development of norms. But transformation and civility are thereby also difficult to distinguish in Balibar's writings. Both have to do with changes of institutionalizations and identifications while both also require an 'art of politics', which has as its means of disposal "statements, signs and roles" (Balibar, 2002, p. 35). In this regard, the art of politics is also about developing what Balibar calls *fictive universality*, which is distinguished from so-called 'real universality' in the sense that fictive universality is characterized as a normative "fiction" that points to "the realization of a superior and more abstract goal" (p. 157). Thus, the 'fictive' element is that it contains an aspirational dimension toward something that has not been achieved yet. Roughly put, if real universality is change by itself – for instance, that globalization makes the world more interconnected – fictive universality consists of the attempts to change these changes in the direction of emancipation and thus a more universal community. Clear examples of fictive universality are political ideologies and programs as well as some literature and art. Fictive universality is *normativity in a more all-encompassing form and as a broader gesture*. From this perspective, the concepts of transformation and civility also connect because emancipation only unfolds through such historical 'fictions' that transformation and civility both develop. In this context, one side of fictive universality, transformation, may be interpreted as the more *internal aspect*, in which politics develops and thus also intensifies through historical processes of, for instance, revolutionary struggles and fundamental changes in public opinion – while another side, civility, seems oppositely to be about the more *external aspect* of fictive universality which concerns its relation to the outer limits of politics, as mentioned before, whether these are perceived as being, for instance, biological, economical, or ideological limits.

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According to Claudia Aradau, Balibar's idea of civility is particularly about "creating spaces" for emancipation at a distance from institutions so that we do not remain stuck in institutional forms such as the global institutional order of war and security, which Aradau analyses as a contemporary example (Aradau, 2006, p. 45). In this sense, the task is to create solidarities and movements *that shake and transform given institutions from the outside*. This idea of civility as also being 'meta-institutional' can be interpreted as a way of characterizing the interconnection between civility and transformation because civility keeps challenging the boundaries of those institutions that become transformed throughout history. However, does such a perspective with its idea of distancing from institutions square together with the idea that civility also takes place on the other scene of politics given that this 'scene' is not any specific location at the borders of institutions? The notion that civility only exists at the borders of institutions can, at least, give the wrong impression that the concepts of civility and transformation are fully continuous in the sense that civility is simply a more external transformation of politics in contrast to an institutionalized transformation that changes from within. Thus, one might miss that they do point to different perspectives on, and approaches to, political practice. To Balibar, civility questions the unstable ground of politics in a radical manner that exceeds the categories of both fictive universality as well as transformation (Balibar, 2015, p. 35). In other words, civility is not really a space on its own, not even a space of transformation, but *a distinct modality of politics that both constructs and deconstructs spaces*.

However, civility must still be mediated by transformation as that which provides the specific identities and institutions by which civility develops politics and relates to emancipation as its more ideal counterpart. If transformation is about the different forms of civility, emancipation points to that which all these forms are oriented towards – even if emancipation with its universal character cannot be said to constitute one unified ideal to Balibar. However, Balibar does not theorize explicitly the relation between civility and transformation, which makes it a difficult task to interpret exactly how these two concepts of politics relate. Rather than a different concept of politics, transformation as the shifting conditions that change politics can also be conceived as *an internal aspect* of both civility and emancipation. But if it is not internal, it seems to be difficult to relate these categories to each other and any theorist will, perhaps, ultimately need to characterize civility as being entirely separate from transformation. Balibar avoids this problem by not fully theorizing the relation. But if Balibar did this, he might have arrived at a similar conception as Geneviève Souillac who seems to conceive of civility as a quasi-transcendent 'inscription' into

politics. Thereby, civility would be conceived as *a more static form* of antiviolent and metapolitical intervention that changes the continuous transformation of politics but itself remains unchanged.

This also relates to Dimitris Vardoulakis' interpretation of Balibarian civility as a practice that "links the ethical with the ontologico-political nexus" (Vardoulakis, 2017, p. 915). To Vardoulakis, Balibar's idea of civility is an expression of the insight that politics necessarily contains an ethical dimension about how humans relate to and depend upon one another, which can be traced all the way back to Baruch de Spinoza and his notion of democracy. Vardoulakis also characterizes Balibar's idea of civility as a way of articulating "the necessity of the inscription of the ethical within the political", which again seems to resemble Souillac's notion of civility as an inscription into democratic politics that remains at least partly autonomous from political developments. In this sense, Vardoulakis interprets Balibarian civility as a relation between politics and ethics in which ethics is not derived from politics. However, since ethics is not explored on its own by Balibar such an 'inscription of the ethical within the political' still appears more as *an absorption and enclosure of ethics in a political frame*. At least in Balibar's own writings, there is no reference to an autonomy of ethics implied by the practices of civility as there is an autonomy of politics.

But this does seem to express a tendency in the reception of Balibar to interpret his conception of civility as a *political ethics* with antiviolence as an ethical principle that must be considered valuable both inside and outside of politics. Balibarian civility has, for instance, been advocated by theorists within educational research who stress the idea of antiviolence as useful in pedagogic contexts with a particular focus on democratic participation. This often also implies an emphasis on the idea that civility can connect ethics to political action, such as when Martha Ritter interprets Balibarian civility as an "ethics required for collective participation in democracy" (Ritter, 2018, p. 3). Especially in Ritter's interpretation, it seems as if antiviolence is thought of as *a prior ethical stance* that only turns into civility when it is also coupled with political action. But again, Balibar's own writings do not seem to follow such a line of thought since antiviolence is itself a response to the problematic role of violence *within* politics. If we recall the distinction from the first part of the dissertation, civility as antiviolence is an *ethical politics* rather than a political ethics since the ethical horizon is constituted within the practice of politics. Both antiviolence and emancipation as the 'ethical figure' of the autonomy of politics are inherent to the exercise of politics. Speaking of emancipation outside of politics must therefore also be self-contradictory on this view since

emancipation *is* a political process. Balibar's idea of civility can thereby be characterized as *an ontopolitical conception*, even though it also posits a moral dimension within politics as a practice.

What is missing in such a conception of civility is also a focus on ethics as a mode of normativity on its own. As other theorists, Balibar does characterize civility as an ethical practice in the sense of a distinct approach to combat violence, but it is a practice that is *tied to a metapolitical objective*. Even if Balibar were to claim that it also retains a more independent role, his conception of such an ethics seems quite limited. Antiviolence as *the* ethics of civility as such would at least be a 'terribly restrictive answer' – to apply Balibar's own words – when compared to the many other values, ideals, and orientations of ethics that have been discussed in this thesis. Balibar's notion of civility as such an ontopolitical conception, or an ethical politics, does provide a relevant and meaningful contribution to broader ontological reflections on politics and its shifting conditions. But, given that ethics does not simply derive from politics, this conception does not capture both sides of the 'dual relationship' with both morality and politics that Balibar also recognizes as *the unique feature* that distinguishes the concept of civility. Perhaps it was also not Balibar's intention to do so, but it should be clear at this point in the thesis that the concept of civility can furthermore point to a relation *between* ethics and politics, which must go beyond a focus on politics alone.

In this connection, Balibar has remarked that the three concepts of politics do not constitute a whole but are markers of "individual pathways". They do not form a 'theory of politics', to Balibar, since there is "no sense in trying to turn these complex presuppositions into a system, or arrange them in some invariant order" (Balibar, 2002, p. 35). But even though Balibar's conception of civility is thereby not posited within an established political ontology, there are still particularly two lessons to be drawn from such a conceptual approach that interprets civility together with two other concepts as central to at least *ontological considerations of what politics as such is about*. These two lessons are that an ontological approach to conceiving civility should specifically focus on two important dimensions of such a conception: *Connections* and *boundaries*. As to Balibar, there are clearly some connections between emancipation, transformation, and civility, but what these connections are remains to be explored more in-depth even if they cannot constitute a 'system'. As already discussed, this is particularly the case for the unclear connection between transformation and civility. At the same time, with such a broad scope it is also important to focus on not only the boundaries of civility itself, as I did in a previous chapter, but also on how civility

can both change and be changed by the boundaries of something that reaches beyond civility. As to Balibar, this is explicitly the shifting boundaries of politics that civility is tied to, but I will develop this even further in the next chapter by reconceptualizing civility as a practice that *changes together with the boundaries of both ethics and politics*. These two focal points thereby express that an ontological approach focus on how civility is 'more than itself'; that its meaning is also given and developed through a broad context. This means that an ontological conception cannot merely provide a brief definition of what civility is; it must also focus on the context that civility cannot be separated from because this provides essential insight into what the concept points to.

To conclude this chapter, the analysis of Balibar' conception of civility has provided an inspiring but also challenging example of how to theorize civility within a broad ontological frame. From this perspective, civility is not simply about, for instance, a set of behavioral norms but relates to how normative standards and ideals as such are constantly being developed, challenged, and renegotiated in human societies. However, its limitations also point toward the possibility of developing *an even more far-reaching ontology of civility* by conceiving it as being both a type of normative orientation that contains internal conflict and a relation between politics and ethics. Therefore, the last chapter, which can be said to constitute a second part *within* the second part of the thesis, will develop this conception of civility more fully. This chapter retains relevant insights from both Balibar and other theorists but also shows that a slightly changed frame of interpretation provides us with a meaningful understanding of civility as a relation between ethics and politics.

To this purpose, the final chapter will first develop the idea that civility can be thought of as not only a metapolitics but also, to paraphrase Balibar, an 'ethics in the second degree'. It will also elaborate a notion of civility as *a continually transforming dialectics* in the sense that it can be defined by its own 'discontents', its internal conflicts and tensions.[45] In addition, the chapter will also include reflections and discussions about the value of civility on this account. The aim is overall to elaborate a meaningful interpretation of civility that theorizes both its broad scope and its distinctive but historically situated structure. This is also why I use more examples in the last

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[45] In fairness, I am not the first theorist ever refering to a 'dialectics of civility'. In *Reflections on Violence* (1996), John Keane also writes about a "dialectics of civility" that develops when violence is being reduced in society, while people are simultaneously being exposed to more and more violence in the media. But in this sense, Keane's dialectics of civility seems to be more precisely *a dialectics of non-violence* involving a contradiction between appearance and reality: The more violence there appears to be around us, the less there is (Keane, 1996, p. 119).

chapter since they are meant to show how we can interpret societal developments and events differently with these new 'conceptual glasses'. The examples show how this conception of civility cannot simply be equated with a limited set of practices such as codes of politeness in public spheres; that *civility emerges within various historical contexts, societies, and peoples*. In this sense, the examples are not just illustrative but formative as well in the development of such a new conception of civility. The examples are not primarily meant to reinforce prevalent intuitions but to push and challenge us. In this sense, the idea is that it is sometimes only through a 'disturbance' of language that we recognize parts of reality that have been right in front of us the whole time.

8.   A distinct mode of normativity

To start with, let us briefly turn toward literature to provide a sense of direction for this reconceptualization. In J.G. Ballard's *Empire of the Sun* we follow Jim, a young British boy born and raised in Shanghai by a wealthy family, attempting to survive and find his parents throughout the Japanese occupation of China during World War II. For several years, Jim is imprisoned in a camp where the Japanese soldiers suddenly one day force all the prisoners onto a parade ground. Unsure of what is about to happen, Jim – who at this point is starving and have lost all hope – is about to say to Mr Maxted, a fellow British prisoner, that the soldiers do not need to kill them because they are already dead inside. In other words, Jim seems on the verge of turning into a very young Muselmann, feeling that his soul has already left his body. But before finishing his sentence, Mr Maxted interrupts him and presses the boy's head to his emaciated chest while saying: "Jim! Remember you're British". Jim becomes a bit calmer after this and even smiles a bit, but he still retains the same grim outlook and feels sorry for Mr Maxted that this injunction was the only thing that he could think of to reassure Jim. With Balibar, we can interpret this small drama as a civil attempt to interrupt the extreme violence of the camp by referring to a shared political identity of being British. But as Jim himself perceives, there is a weak link between such an invocation and their struggle for survival, which is why it seems to constitute more *a feeble act of civility* than any transformation of significance to those conditions that are holding them down in a tight grip.

But is this explanatory framework with its focus on the opposition between extreme violence and politics enough to grasp why and how Mr Maxted can be said to act civilly? What if there is another element that we can add to the analysis; an ethical component pertaining to the dialogue and the embrace between the two that cannot be ignored as irrelevant to such a situation or subsumed under a political perspective? It is at least clear that Mr Maxted's injunction for Jim to remember that he is British also expresses a more immediate sense of normativity in this encounter with a demoralized young boy; a form of ethics that is not directly related to political developments. In this connection, I will argue in this chapter that the concept of civility can also point to a certain 'autonomy of ethics', even though this might be just as fragile and changeable as politics – that civility thus constitutes a relation *between* ethics and politics. This also entails some discontinuity between ethics and politics; a certain autonomy on both sides even when they are most entangled.

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To argue for this ontological and ethico-political conception of civility, the chapter will proceed in the following steps. In the first section, I will present how I conceive of civility as a distinct relation between ethics and politics that *continuously transforms the boundaries of both* even while they remain partly separate and autonomous. It is also argued that this unpredictable process tends to produce what I call a 'contingency effect' in the sense of increased awareness that the relation between ethics and politics is not set in advance but is contingent upon various circumstances. In the second section, I will present the internal dynamic of civility as a specific type of normative orientation that is in an ongoing conflict with itself. In this context, it will also be shown that this conception of civility has *a predominantly formal character* since the only recurring 'substance' is the persistence of internal conflict. Finally, I will turn in the third section to the question of the value of civility and discuss this based on the reconceptualization that I offer. What I will argue is that civility is instrumentally valuable through its potential to *reflexively mediate between ethics and politics* granted that reflection on ethico-political issues is, at least today, highly important.

8.1.   Short circuits of politics and ethics

To be clear about this, the conception that will be presented in this final chapter differs from many other conceptions of civility. As Sune Lægaard points out, it is possible to distinguish between conceptions that equate civility with specific norms of social interaction and others that, on a more general level, present the concept as a "socio-theoretical" and "analytical category" (Lægaard, 2013, p. 127). According to Lægaard, the latter and probably rarer type of conception is not as normative or 'evaluative' compared to when civility is conceived as a specific set of norms, which is usually evaluated by both liberals and critical theorists. What makes the latter type of conception relevant for us is rather that it can provide us with *more far-reaching insight* about, for instance, what a society is. In Lægaard's proposed version of such a conception, civility refers to a "non-legal, horizontal type of relationship between members of a society" through shifting attitudes and standards of conduct (p. 126). The conception that I propose is even wider in its scope than this since it is not restricted to a bounded community with 'members' and 'non-members', which is most often also difficult to demarcate as discussed in earlier parts of the thesis. That is, the aim with such a conception of civility is not so much to contribute to a 'societal ontology' but to focus on the relation between ethics and politics that is slightly different from a focus on what a society is about. In addition, it is not presumed that this conception of civility can only be descriptive,

even though its normative status will be explored as a more open question. As I will argue later in this chapter, it seems plausible to claim that civility in this sense is, at the very least, instrumentally valuable since it provides us with a possible way to reflexively mediate between ethics and politics.

In this section, civility will be interpreted as not only being a metapolitics in Étienne Balibar's sense but also a 'metaethics', even though in a quite different sense than what this concept usually entails. To this purpose, it is worth first reflecting upon the meaning and relevance of using such concepts as Balibar's metapolitics. At least in relation to metaethics, the prefix 'meta-' usually designates a theoretical endeavor to capture the essence or whole of a specific subject (Plakias, 2016). This also entails the connotation of an investigation that searches for what it 'really' is to be, for instance, ethical or political. Balibar's conception of metapolitics seems to be different from such a notion in at least two ways. First, Balibar interprets metapolitics as *a practical engagement with politics* rather than as merely contemplative. Second, what metapolitics engages with is not the whole of politics and certainly not its unchangeable essence. It is rather the evolving conditions of politics that are connected to its porous boundaries instead of constituting a constitutive outside that somehow supports what is inside of politics. In line with such an approach, my claim is similarly that metaethics can be understood as *a practical engagement with the evolving conditions and boundaries of ethics* rather than with its 'essence' – and therefore also its existence as such because without some boundaries there, ultimately, cannot be a distinct set of practices that we can describe as ethical. If ethics is about taming normativity, as I have phrased it previously, metaethics is an engagement with the shifting circumstances that can both facilitate and hinder such a repeated taming. But can metaethics be conceived as just as much a part of civility as metapolitics? In the following pages, I will argue that this is possible through both conceptual elaboration and the use of two selected examples, starting with an example from the French Revolution to show in a concrete way what it is that the metaethical dimension of civility points to. From a perspective that includes this dimension, civility also *transforms ethics itself* by changing its porous boundaries.

One of the early developments during the French Revolution, which is probably the most famous and debated of all revolutions today, was Louis XVI's summoning of the legislative body Estates-General in January 1789. A traditional part of the Estates-General's functioning was the process of receiving "cahiers de doléances" ('books of grievances'), which were letters of complaints and suggestions for institutional change initially composed by meetings in the parishes and town halls

passed to higher district courts and finally to the Estates-General. It was an elaborate process to follow all these procedures leading to the final presentations and *the political space* where even the king lent his ear by listening to some of these complaints. However, we can also describe the practice itself of articulating grievances through the reflections, dialogues, and language that were developed and repeated in situations such as the initial meetings as *a certain type of ethics.* What was so startling about these new 'cahiers de doléances' in 1789 was that the otherwise common practice of articulating what you think is wrong in your everyday life *seemed to be invented anew*; as if the citizens suddenly realized the possibility of a whole new manner of not only addressing authorities but also speaking to themselves. As David Andress critically remarks about the process whereby the citizens in higher district courts partly changed the letters to fit their own agendas:

"What was obscured in this process, however, was the extent to which the rural parishes had used the cahiers to vent an extraordinary range of grievances, and to do so with both frequent venom and occasional eloquence (Andress, 2004, p. 93).

In this sense, the letters both expressed and played an active part in the changing articulations of people's own grievances; a change in the basic coordinates of what they found either tolerable or intolerable in their daily lives. The formulation of these letters thus seems to have changed the boundaries of both ethics and politics at once, which means that they did not simply express a political ethics by already given grievances influencing the space of politics or an ethical politics with political developments altering people's grievances. Instead, the practice of formulating these letters appears to be exactly *in-between* as both a politics and an ethics in the 'second degree'. This possibility of being in-between and changing the boundaries at two fronts at once is what I call civility. If we follow this idea about civility being not only a metapolitics but also a metaethics, these letters were only civil to the extent that they not only changed politics as an early part of the French Revolution but also developed people's relations to themselves as grieving, and thus ethical, subjects further. From this perspective, grieving is just as much a changing practice as it is an emotional experience of being wronged. If one only characterizes the political process of the 'cahiers de doléances' as civil this might also ignore how the letters changed *the ethical boundaries of grievances*; an ethics that is perhaps not always as visible in the public sphere but must evolve across centuries in different forms just as there are ethical practices of celebration, mourning, and quarrels. Thus, civility implies that ethical boundaries and political boundaries change together.

However, it is important to recognize that this does not entail that those who are civil in one way or the other control how moral and political practices change. Quite oppositely, there seems to be an ineradicable and uncontrollable tension between, on the one hand, moral and political practices and, on the other hand, civility as the distinct type of connection that relates the two together. Civility only exists in between these two modes of normativity as *an unpredictable 'embodiment' of their tension-full relation*. In the following, we will explore further how such a ground-shaking movement 'short-circuits' politics and ethics by creating unexpected connections between the two. In this regard, I will argue that no matter the exact role that civility plays in its various forms, it tends to produce a *contingency effect* as an increased awareness on its unpredictable development.

So, the metapolitics and metaethics of civility imply transforming the boundaries of both ethics and politics in ways that cannot be controlled beforehand. But is the very existence of ethics and politics also at stake through such a transformation? As discussed in the methodological chapter, the mutual influence between ethics and politics already implies that they can both question and sometimes even obstruct one another as partly separate modes of normativity. On this conception of civility as both metaethical and metapolitical, civility constitutes a distinct way in which this mutual influence and thus dynamic relation between ethics and politics develops on *a more continuous basis*, even if this does not lead to a more stable relation. In this connection, we can also distinguish between two different senses of what a 'relation' between ethics and politics might be. In a weaker sense, ethics and politics are related simply by setting shifting limits and conditions for each other, which does not necessarily imply civility as a mediator. But in the stronger sense of the term that is applied in this context, a relation between ethics and politics also implies that they connect and influence one another on a more continuous basis. In this stronger sense, a relation can be conceived as being *both mutual and significant* because both parts of the relation are continuously transformed in the process of relating to each other, whereby both their boundaries and constitution must be changed. From this latter perspective, civility conceived as both a metaethics and a metapolitics can be characterized as not only a relation amongst others but as *the relation between ethics and politics as such* since it, as I will argue, seems to be the only way in which they are related in this stronger and more significant sense of the term. Thus, 'the autonomy of ethics', which I referred to in the previous chapter to complement Balibar's 'the autonomy of politics', does not just mean that civility is about ethical practices being a stabilizing factor in politics on this conception since that would not in itself be a mutually significant relation.

But if civility changes both ethics and politics, does this mean that civility is the name for a *co-dependence* of ethics and politics? In line with previous claims of both being partly autonomous, the point is that they do also exist as more separate practices but *when* and *to the extent* they relate civility is exactly the normative 'glue' that binds them together. A clear example of this is human rights since they often connect politics and ethics together. In his writings on human rights, Étienne Balibar argues that the lack of a clear balancing scale between different human rights and various interpretations of what they imply are *political* characteristics of contemporary human rights because this testifies to an ongoing conflict about what it is that emancipation and thus politics itself implies. But this political character does not preclude human rights from also being a set of moral practices that, as Costas Douzinas notes, can be connected to our sense of what the 'human' in human rights means (Douzinas, 2007, p. 9). In this regard, human rights can be civil to the extent that they become *both ethically stabilized and politically contested*. If this is so, this means that there is also both an ethics of human rights as well as a politics of human rights that are partially separate from each other, even though human rights as a civil practice implies that they connect. In this sense, human rights also become civil when the boundaries between practicing human rights as an established ethics and contesting human rights in a political space are transformed by a distinct third way of approaching the complex of human rights, which mediates between these two.

In this connection, Douzinas claims that not only human rights but rights as such have "become the mark of civility of a society" in the Western world (p. 50). However, if this is meant to imply that rights have become so dominant in a Western context that their existence and institutional role have acquired a sense of an unquestionable normative order, they are at least not civil in this conception but rather *morally established norms*. Rights in general are only civil to the extent that they can at the same time be repeatedly politicized as, for instance, being self-contradictory or potential instruments of domination. In other words, human rights can be characterized as civil on this conception when conflict and critique are not simply external to how they are practiced and developed over time but also constitute *an internal feature*. What critics of human rights such as Douzinas seem to criticize is the development of a more settled ethics of human rights, which some also call 'post-political', even though this might co-exist with an opposite politicization of human rights that clashes with such an ethics. It would take a much more detailed and empirically sensitive analysis to discuss whether this is indeed the case today. However, the underlying point of this is merely to demonstrate that a manifestation of civility connected to, for instance, human rights

cannot arise simply from political clashes; it also requires that a normative practice comes into being that *mediates between such tendencies to either 'ethicize' or 'politicize' their existence*.[46]

In this regard, a contingency effect of civility arises through the *short circuits* of unexpected connections between these partly separate modes of normativity; short circuits that connect the established normative practices of ethics and the political spaces of conflict close together. In its literal sense, a 'short circuit' is often defined as an abnormal or unintended connection in an electrical circuit, in which excessive current flows through the circuit with low resistance. In the metaphorical sense applied in this connection, the short circuits between ethics and politics that constitutes civility can also be seen as 'excessive' since such short circuits develop them both in unpredictable ways. However, the contingency effect points to *the absence of a normal and stable circuit of connections between ethics and politics*. In this sense, the continuous development of civility does not deviate from any normal relation between ethics and politics. These short circuits are in what we might call their 'unnormal normality' all there is since they do not deviate from any standard circuit. The contingency effect is the emerging awareness that there is no standard to rely on. It might often be difficult to tell how far-reaching this effect is, and there is no guarantee that such an awareness does arise through the development of civility, but it is connected to what civility does; that it both constitutes, develops, and questions the relation between ethics and politics. This also means that civility must be *a boundary-changing process* since it alters the boundaries between ethics and politics. But what is the internal dynamic of such a boundary-changing process? In the following section, I will argue for my interpretation of this. First, it will be argued that civility has a predominantly formal character by developing through shifting 'formations' that can also be described as concrete instances of normative orientations. Second, I will develop the idea that civility also implies internal conflict between the different parts within these formations, which will be both illustrated and elucidated through a few selected examples.

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[46] In Samuel Moyn's historical overview of global discussions and discourses on human rights in the twentieth century, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History,* it is argued that at least since the 1970s these discourses have oscillated between moral idealism and political pragmatism as well as between a minimalist and a maximalist program of social reform. In this sense, human rights have often and in various ways become a normative orientation that not only contains but *develops internal conflict* as to its meaning and significance (Moyn, 2012).

8.2.   Internally conflictual formations

As already mentioned, Étienne Balibar's concept of 'transformation' can be interpreted as an internal dynamic of civility in the sense that it is continually transformed through specific traditions, practices, and values or, in other words, through certain *formations*. In one sense, these formations provide meaning and guidance in a similar way as ethical practices do. But in another sense, they are more complex than ethical practices since they are also internally divided between aspirations and commitments that each provide their own perspective on what the purpose and direction of the civil formation ought to be. Thereby, civility comes to relate to the disunion of politics through its own tension and incompleteness. This also means that there is *a formal aspect* to every civil formation in the sense that it contains conflicting interpretations of what it means and which function it ought to play in a broader context. As presented earlier in the thesis, being 'formal' can exactly be defined as having more than one meaning. Even an established ideal can still be considered civil if there is such a formal aspect to the perceived relation between ideal and reality such as conflicting interpretations of whether reality already contains the ideal but in a less developed version or the ideal escapes reality as we know it in a more utopian vein. In this sense, a civil formation is the sort of practice that keeps escaping any tendency to become a static whole. Civil formations are always also normative orientations, but what the concept of 'formation' points to is that civility develops through identifiable and yet continuously changing *forms* of orientation.

In the following, I will elucidate this internal dynamic of civility with two selected examples of civil formations expressing such internal conflict. In this regard, it is important to emphasize that the conflict in question must be internal to the specific formation to be designated as civil on this account. The point is, namely, that civility is not itself a politics but influences the more open and external conflicts of politics in different ways through its own partially unified and relatively stable, even if also shifting, framework. Civility is inherently connected to the open space of politics, but it does not constitute such a space on its own. The first example is a proclaimed right to overthrow the government in Mo Yan's novel *The Garlic Ballads* (1988), while the second is a claim that it is possible to 'steal oneself' from the real-life court case of the slave Hans Jonathan in the beginning of the 19th century. These two examples have primarily been chosen because they highlight the internal dynamic of civility within specific formations that are not usually associated with the behavioral norms that we often designate as 'civil' in a Western context. In this sense,

they also show how this conception of civility provides a broad ontological perspective, since civility can seemingly arise *whenever and wherever that ethics and politics connect to one another*.

The Chinese author Mo Yan's novel *The Garlic Ballads* (1988) revolves around the situation of farmers in "Paradise County" who are encouraged by the Chinese government to plant garlic but subsequently cannot sell them to a saturated market. After a mass riot at the county administration, a trial begins in the People's Court of Paradise County to prosecute those deemed as most responsible. During this legal process, a young officer who defends his father on trial gives a speech that upsets the judges by claiming that the peasants are partly justified in their rage against the local administration and that their behavior cannot simply be penalized as being so-called 'counterrevolutionary'. The speech makes a great stir in the courtroom amongst both judges, defendants, and the audience – and therefore *politicizes* an atmosphere that was otherwise infused with moral norms of how to behave and maintain order in a legal setting. At the end of the speech, the officer presents a general principle that if a party or administration does not work in the people's interest, the people have 'a right to overthrow it'. This causes a tremendous shock in the courtroom, even though the officer quickly adds that it does not apply to the Communist Party of China; the party should simply continue to be aware of such a principle and punish those few local administrators who discredit the reputation of the whole government. In this regard, even if we understand the former principle as being unconditional it can still constitute a formation of civility if its exact meaning becomes subject to conflicting interpretations *right from when it is articulated*.

What does it mean that 'we' have a right to overthrow the government? The very presence of this question and the troubling reflection that it provokes clearly causes a stir amongst the audience. That the young officer formulates it in such broad terms that are not directly targeted against the Communist Party of China makes it more difficult to dismiss, perhaps even for a government official. But in a societal context where the government is invested with almost supreme authority it is nonetheless a troubling principle to reflect on, which presumably causes internal conflict between interpretations and normative commitments. In this regard, it also results in a contingency effect that questions the 'natural' role which the Chinese government plays in society. Perhaps this has also been an effect on some readers, particularly Chinese citizens, when they have read *The Garlic Ballads*. But regardless of the possible connections, or lack thereof, between fiction and

reality in this case, 'the right to overthrow the government' in the novel becomes a civil formation in the context of the courtroom with its moral norms and the conflictual setting in Paradise County.

The second example shows how the internal division of a formation of civility can even develop into what seems to be *an outright paradox*; an internal contradiction between two directly opposite interpretations of the same normative stance. The context for this example is that at the beginning of the nineteenth century slaves became increasingly seen in many parts of the world as not only things that could be possessed as private property but also as autonomous subjects. These conflicting moral intuitions naturally led to a range of political conflicts. One of these took place in Denmark where a slave from the Danish West Indies, Hans Jonathan, escaped from the widowed lady Henriette Catharina von Schimmelmann. During his escape, Hans Jonathan became recruited by the navy and even became a war hero after his efforts at the Battle of Copenhagen in 1801. So, when Hans Jonathan was arrested and put on trial there was particularly in his case a public awareness of the uncertainty regarding his status as *a legal quasi-subject*. Based on conflicting intuitions and the conflict between Hans Jonathan and his owner, the attorney made a curious decision. He decided that Hans Jonathan was guilty of having "stolen himself", which can be said to constitute a formation of civility since such a paradoxical claim of being both a thief and the stolen item transforms the relation between two radically different ethical practices; of treating humans as either equal autonomous subjects or as in some cases simple possessions (Duedahl, 2018, p. 29). The ambivalence within this statement, to 'steal oneself', resembles thereby also the idea proposed by Melanie White that civility can be both emancipatory and oppressive at once – even though it today rather seems to be *an example of incivility* due to the injustice of the verdict.

Perhaps this paradox of conflicting intuitions was also part of the reason why Schimmelmann, who was now recognized as the rightful owner of Hans Jonathan if she would bring him back to the Danish West Indies, did not act on this legal recognition. We do not know exactly why, but Hans Jonathan was never captured again. Instead, he managed to flee toward Iceland where he settled for the rest of his life with a wife and two children. But even if the judgment of Hans Jonathan stealing himself was quickly forgotten, it still manifested a civil formation that through its internal conflict presumably provoked reflection and perhaps self-critique for Schimmelmann and others. At least, the paradoxical normative orientation that it is possible to steal oneself does not just constitute an ethics on its own unless the conflict between the opposite intuitions about personhood

and slavery are being suppressed or, for some reason, not noticed at all. It is also not a political conflict on an established space of appearance since its evolving conflict is, at least momentarily, contained within its unique formation. But it relates to both ethics and politics in the sense that it refers to *both* different moral norms and ongoing political conflicts about the institution of slavery.

As Christopher Zurn points out, there are many critics of civility who claim that it is "vacuously indeterminate" (Zurn, 2013, p. 351). In this sense, as Zurn also mentions, civility can be interpreted as a so-called 'empty signifier' implying that it does not contain any substantial meaning, opposite to which Zurn and other theorists claim that civility *is* something substantial. However, in this elaborated conception it is part of the determination of civility as a concept that it also points to *a certain indeterminateness through its open-ended internal conflict*. That there is a formal aspect to civility is exactly a way to characterize such indeterminateness. But in that case, what becomes of the recurring idea that there is a 'substantial civility' or a substantial 'truth' as to what it means to be civil, which we discussed in the first part of the thesis? Even though this idea usually does not capture any internal conflict of civility, as I have argued, it might still reflect *a frequent urge* within civil formations to resolve their own tensions. The search for a substance of civility can thus be thought of as a search for a final answer as to what a specific formation of civility implies; what it means and what it calls for in a normative sense. The substantial perspective on civility *pushes for closure*, even though it might offer an overload of internally opposing interpretations of such a closure. As Richard Boyd notes, "substantive civility" can be interpreted as that which is 'fundamental' and thus more established and fixed than formal civility (Boyd, 2006, p. 864). But in my conception, we do not need to presuppose that there is such a stable foundation for all civil formations. The only substantial aspect of civility, on this account, is that it develops by being internally conflictual. However, the substantial perspective can still express an 'urge', or at least an aspiration, to overcome this internal division of civility, which repeatedly seems to emerge.

A clear example of such an urge can be found in the type of defense of morally questionable actions that Michael Ignatieff has developed through the noticeable term "the lesser evil". Writing in the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2011, Ignatieff claims that "necessity may require us to take actions in defense of democracy which will stray from democracy's own fundamental commitments to dignity" in the form of acts such as torture of suspects or extended surveillance of citizens (Ignatieff, 2004, p. 8). To Ignatieff, necessity puts us in a 'dirty hands

dilemma' that implies the inevitability of doing something evil even when the actor tries to balance between different risks. In sum, this explicitly tragic idea of a lesser evil means that we have still done badly even when it was in fact for the greater good. However, the idea of a lesser evil becomes, in this sense, an almost as *paradoxical unity* between conflicting intuitions about right and wrong as the previously discussed notion of stealing oneself. The idea that it is still possible to at least choose the 'lesser evil', or perhaps even that there is no choice since one is constrained by necessity, reflects an urge to *overcome* such an internal conflict within this formation of civility.

The idea of a 'lesser evil' as a normative orientation in a context of, for instance, terrorism and national security is only civil to the extent that it does provide a way of evolving such an internal conflict. The conflict is overcome if it becomes an established normative principle or perhaps just a rhetorical slogan. At least for Ignatieff, this does not seem to be the case since he does confront the dilemmas and uncertainties associated with the idea. But a reader of Ignatieff might still interpret this approach, which is also described as a "political ethics", as just *an advanced ethics in a world of political tragedies*; an ethics that resolves the dilemmas of what to do in, for instance, desperate situations of terrorist threats. From a substantial perspective, the paradox of the lesser evil can thus be elevated into a 'higher unity' that does not differ from other utilitarian perspectives on the pursuit of a greater good in which there is one and only one correct answer for how to act.

There is much more to be said about, for instance, the ongoing discussions on what a democratic society ought to do, and not do, as a response to terrorist threats. The example with the idea of a lesser evil is not meant to cover the whole of this discussion but rather to analyze an easily understandable example of how an urge to overcome the internal conflict of civility can arise. What both this and the previous examples also point to is that a determination of whether a practice is civil or uncivil, right or wrong, cannot be made with certainty *when you are in the midst of such an internal conflict*. In a strict sense, this must be assessed by a judgment from the outside. As discussed earlier in the thesis, civility is usually described as the opposite of incivility with the presumption that civility is more valuable than incivility. In the following section of this chapter, I will focus on this issue and argue that civility in its continuously developing formations is valuable because it continues to carry a potential to *reflexively mediate between ethics and politics*.

8.3.   The potential for reflexive mediation

So, civility can thus be conceived as the relation between ethics and politics in which they also constitute partly separate modes of normativity. In this section, I will argue that civility is at least instrumentally valuable because it can thereby reflexively mediate between ethics and politics through its formations in a way that is better than when ethics and politics exist alongside each other as more separate practices. But how can we know that ethics and politics as separate practices are *less valuable* without rather than with the 'intervention' of civility? In this regard, my approach will not consist in claiming that civility always and everywhere possesses such a positive value but suggest that its many formations and developments, at least today, do seem to point in this direction. In line with the pragmatic approach to conceptualizations of civility, this does not exclude that civility can be just as meaningfully assessed as valuable or the opposite, intrinsically and instrumentally, in other accounts such as all those that have been analyzed in this thesis. It is not itself contradictory to claim that civility on one account is harmful but valuable on another.

In the following, I will first discuss the overall value of ethics and politics being related to each other in comparison to the opposite and, thereafter, argue for the distinct value of civility carrying a potential for reflection on ethico-political matters with consideration of the implications that this might have for how we can understand incivility as something less valuable. In this regard, it is worth noting that even if the first part about the overall value of ethics and politics being related does not prove convincing it is still possible to follow the second part, which argues that when ethics and politics do relate it is at least valuable to reflexively mediate between the two. The question about the overall value, or lack thereof, of ethics and politics being related to each other is one that reaches beyond the bounds of this project, and perhaps it is also a question that cannot even be meaningfully answered once-and-for-all. In this connection, the purpose of my limited discussion is only to render it probable that it is indeed valuable for ethics and politics to be related.

So, civility is often thought of as a restraint on the escalating development of political conflict within an institutionalized space. Within agonistic thought, this type of restraint can be seen as *double-edged*; it helps to maintain a certain organized space by, for instance, norms of behavior in the public sphere but always at the cost of possibly suppressing the conflict that civility is merely meant to facilitate. In a similar manner, this conception of civility implies that some conflicts are partly contained through its various formations, at least momentarily, instead of being subject to

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contestation in a political arena, even though it might also result in previously uncontested norms becoming subject to political conflict. However, what is it that happens when civility is *entirely absent from a political context*? Since this also implies the absence of a continuous mediation between ethics and politics, political actors are more 'left alone' in their ongoing confrontation with conflict. Given that it is quite difficult to stay within such a state – at least for human beings in the 21st century – this will presumably give rise to a desire to either regulate such conflict through ethics or shut the space of politics down by, for instance, engaging in a violent struggle between conflicting parties, which quite often also expresses a certain form of ethics on both sides. This seems to be the choice that actors in, for instance, international peace negotiations as an organized space of conflict must often make: To either 'tame' such negotiations through an agreement of specific ground rules and thereby moral norms for interaction or return to the violent struggle, which can be said to follow *an ethics of violence* in the sense that engaging in warfare is usually done because at least many of those involved practice their violent activities with a sense that they ought to do so. In a certain sense, war is also *the continuation of ethics by other means*.

We might with good reason leave politics as a confrontation with normative problems behind if it is possible to reach a final state where every kind of normative issue is resolved.[47] But since this does not seem to be possible, what can instead happen is that political actors in a more extreme state of conflict leave politics behind by switching over to what we might call an 'ultraethics' that *subdues the tensions fueling such conflict*. In this sense, ultraethics as a neologism can be applied as a way of characterizing a radical type of ethics which actively suppresses any kind of conflict, distortion, or confusion that relate to one's practices. Given that ethics also implies a constitutive disparity between is and ought, ultraethics must lie at *the outer edge* of what can meaningfully be described as ethical in the first place. That is, if an ultraethical approach develops into a position which actively denies that anything at all should be done, at least within a certain context, it also ceases to be ethical. The problem is thereby that a political struggle can turn into an ultraethical effort *to continuously ignore normative problems*. One way of doing so might be to reinterpret

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[47] The possibility of a 'perpetual peace', a state where we have found the solution to all our normative problems and uncertainties, cannot be entirely denied in advance. My intuition is though that this idea mostly belongs to the graveyard which, according to Immanuel Kant, was painted on a Dutch innkeeper's sign bearing the same name as Kant's famous text from 1795. That is, being normative seems to imply *a persistent restlessness*, of not being at peace with oneself – a theme that also relates to philosophical anthropology about man as a 'restless being', whether such "Unruhe" stems from an originary surplus or rather a lack in our very being (Tønder & Thomassen, 2005).

conflict itself so that it becomes the ultimate value to be celebrated even in its violent forms – with a quasi-Nietzschean expression, 'the battle becomes its own purpose'. For instance, an ultraethical approach to the repeated emergence of warfare can consist of a shift from a critical discussion of what the opposing parties are violently doing to each other to an exclusive focus on a positive idea of there being a 'higher purpose' that transcends each of the parties' limited perspectives. Another example of this is when political actors repeatedly hinder some issues from getting political focus by relegating them to an established private sphere even though, or perhaps because, those matters such as domestic violence would pose serious political questions. This can also be interpreted as *an ultraethical strategy* because it dismisses difficult issues as irrelevant just by proclaiming them to be private. In this connection, it must become easier to bring suppressed issues into politics if it is related *through civility* to ethical practices and values that call for these issues to be confronted.

In response to this, civility can function as a reminder within politics that it does not seem to be possible, at least today, to overcome normative problems once-and-for-all. But does this allow us to conclude that politics is an unnecessary and 'dangerous' trouble? A dismissal of politics from an ethical perspective must imply that normative problems should be contained, and perhaps also suppressed, through the practices that ethics consists of. This might, for instance, be expressed as a conservative position that any political conflict threatens the relative stability of established moral norms within a given society. However, the problem seems to be that moral practices cannot easily encapsulate their own unresolved issues and that there are recurrent demands to establish spaces for questioning and, at times, replacing one ethics with another. In this regard, politics can function as an antidote to *the solidification, or 'ossification', of ethics* that may also be threatening to society. Contextual judgment are often said to provide a similar antidote to the ossification of more formalistic and universalist frameworks for ethics (Benhabib, 1989). However, a sensitivity to particular circumstances and dilemmas does not necessarily entail self-critical reflection on the more foundational principles since this can be limited to a question of the application of already established standards. In contrast, *a continuous relation to the open conflicts of politics* can also lead to reflection on the possibility that a set of moral norms might have to be revised in its entirety.

As stated previously, my claim is that civility can be assessed as instrumentally valuable because it harbors *the potential to facilitate a reflexive mediation between politics and ethics* – that is, to make us rethink and perhaps change our current ethico-political situation through the contingency

effect caused by the 'short circuits' between ethics and politics that constitute civility. It might also result in an overwhelming sense of confusion and its dissolution through a regress to a simple separation between ethics and politics. However, even in those cases when this happens civility could still have brought about another result if we had used our reflective and critical capacities differently. For instance, Ignatieff's notion of a 'lesser evil' does not by itself force us to rethink our ethico-political situation but it harbors a potential to do so. In this sense, civility is valuable *to the extent* that using critical reflection to reconsider ethico-political practices is valuable to us.[48]

In the following, I will turn to a brief literary example to show how we might not be sure that civility always brings about such critical reflection that can develop the relation between ethics and politics further, but that it at least harbors a potential to do so. In Leo Tolstoy's novel *War and Peace* from 1869, there is a scene in which Count Rostopchín as commander in chief in Moscow, a city just about to be abandoned by its inhabitants, is brought the political prisoner Vereschágin. Vereschágin is accused by Rostopchín of being a traitor and the sole responsible for their tragic situation in front of a larger crowd. In this sense, Vereschágin is perceived as a 'solution' to the tension-full political discussions both on the streets and in the remaining public and private places that provide some social life about why Moscow, and therefore also Russia as such, seems to be on the brink of collapse. Even though Rostopchín offers Vereschágin to the masses and even commands them to "cut him down", the crowd seems to hesitate several times. In this regard, we can characterize such hesitation as an experience of normative tension with potential political implications. Vereschágin is, ultimately, beaten to death by the pressing and struggling crowd. But even while the violence unfolds, there are still people inside of the crowd itself who react with horror and reproach. As one of them even exclaims: "O Lord! The people are like wild beasts".

In this relation, Count Rostopchín himself also sees the act of killing Vereschágin as horrible. But Rostopchín attempts to persuade himself that pacifying the masses by offering a scapegoat is for "le bien public"; the public good in the sense of the welfare of the people. However, this idea quickly turns into a formation of civility due to its proximity to the horror of the mob. In a similar

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[48] By this I am not claiming that reflection is always valuable but that it probably helps us in *most ethico-political matters*. As Bernard Williams states, if we grant that we may possess some ethical 'knowledge' at an unreflective level that reflection can disturb and unseat, it might also be said that "reflection can destroy knowledge" (2006, p. 148). But this is surely a complicated and partly empirical question. When politics enters the scene there is also an element of open conflict in a situation, which we can either consistently ignore with an ultraethical approach or rather engage with *through* civility and the reflection that may both guide and develop such an engagement.

manner as Ignatieff's 'lesser evil', it becomes an internally conflictual idea for Rostopchín because it also includes its apparent opposite – that *the public good contains a public wrong*. That is, the idea of a cherished welfare of the people seemingly cannot be disconnected from those features of crowds that Rostopchín denounces. It is not clear in the novel how much critical reflection this leads to or whether Rostopchín alters his moral intuitions and approach to politics because of it. But if anyone reaches such a point of internal conflict, one will probably also, at least to some degree, reexamine one's sense of what should count as exactly 'public good' and 'public wrong'.

In this regard, such reflexive mediation can possibly also change the very divide between civility and incivility by effecting 'dialectical reversals' that reinterpret and remark a practice as civil or uncivil, even though it was previously designated as the opposite. As argued earlier in the thesis, the internal dynamic of civility often entails that it becomes contaminated, so to speak, with its contrary pole, incivility, in the sense that its normative status is reconsidered or cannot clearly be characterized as simply positive or negative – as, for instance, either emancipatory or oppressive. Perhaps, it is even the case that certain formations of (in)civility cannot be determined as either civil or uncivil once and for all; that they *continually elude our grasp*. Some theorists attempt to solve this problem by loosening the distinction between civility's goodness and incivility's badness by describing incivility as sometimes righteous and justified. A clear example of this is Amy Olberding who associates incivility with rudeness but claims that she retains a conviction that "surely, some of the time, in some contexts, and with respect to some people, incivility would be justified" (Olberding, 2019, p. 139). But even though such a conviction about incivility can bring about valuable reflections, from a more theoretical perspective Olberding and others who ascribe to a notion of 'righteous incivility' still seem to assume that *what incivility is does not evolve*. It is simply the context for incivility that changes and might make us reexamine its value.

But without a more dynamic notion of (in)civility, such attempts to nuance and clarify its positive or negative value in various circumstances can easily lead to paradoxical results because of the presupposition that it always refers to the same thing. An illustrative example of such a paradoxical result is Howard Curzer's Aristotelian account of civility as *a mean between two vices*, which he describes as, on the one hand, incivility as the deficiency and, on the other hand, "unfailing civility" as the excess (Curzer, 2012, p. 84). It seems that civility itself on this account paradoxically means sometimes *not to be too civil* when, like Olberding's conviction, the context calls for another and

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more radical response such as when someone faces a case of severe injustice. The problem with such a conception is not the paradox as such but that Curzer does not integrate the tension that it carries into his notion of civility. That is, the paradox can also reflect that civility is not 'fully itself' due to civility emerging and developing as being internally split. If it can be considered civil *both to do and not to do* something specific such as being polite in a situation where you are discriminated against, this clearly points to some form of internal conflict. In this sense, the idea of being less than so-called 'unfailingly civil' might be interpreted as the concept of civility changing from only being a reference to, in Curzer's case, primarily ethical principles of respect and toleration to also implying a constantly evolving conflict. For Curzer, there seems to be a split between these two types of civility that are, respectively, an Aristotelian mean between extremes and an unfailing excess. But claiming that the first type of civility is the 'true' one since civility as such an ideal notion cannot be excessive and unbalanced is not the only option. It is also possible to interpret *this split between moderation and excessiveness*, or perhaps in more political terms between realism and idealism, as an internal conflict within at least some formations of civility.[49]

As a mode of normativity defined by internal conflict, civility presumably requires *a minimal form of reflexivity* to exist in a relatively stable form. That is, a civil formation must still be reflectively upheld as a relatively interconnected set-up, even if it is at the same time conflictual and thus also inconsistent. In this sense, civility is *a division that always relates to itself somehow*. But how much reflection it can give rise to, and how it also develops through such reflection, does not seem to be given in advance and might vary considerably between its different formations. Since civility on this conception is not defined by reference to any specific norm such as politeness or active citizenship, civility can even assume horrendous forms such as the legitimation of slavery, torture, and terror. But through its internal conflict civility continually harbors a potential for the civil actor to subjectively fold back upon herself, so to speak, by adding a question mark to these and other practices. To consider whether civility is valuable or not is thus not just to assess a limited set of

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[49] Sungmoon Kim's idea of Confucian civility is also relevant in this regard because it includes some incivilities as "Confucian social practices that temporarily "upset" the existing social relations and yet which, ironically, help those relations to become more enduring and viable" (p. 50). Even more than Amy Olberding and Howard Curzer, Kim's claim is that incivility, distinguised by Kim from "uncivility", can be justified because it hinders docility and *keeps civility alive* – 'incivility' is quite literally in(side) civility. But despite the neatness of such a conceptual elaboration, it still raises the question why it is that civility needs such a supplement; why it is not 'fully itself'.

formations that we gather and judge from an established moral point of view. It rather means to keep focusing on the recurring effects of civility as an evolving practice such as critical reflection.

Relatedly, it is possible as well to distinguish between two different interpretations of *incivility* that both fit together with my reconceptualization. First, we can interpret incivility as simply the absence of civility in the sense that it lacks the internal conflict and thus also potential for reflection through its evolving formations. However, since both moral norms and political conflicts do not by themselves contain such an internal dynamic, it seems more meaningful to designate, for instance, established moral norms as being *acivil* if they are not at all connected to civility. It is at least not necessarily bad, which the concept of incivility most often suggests, that at least some forms of ethics and politics exist without being related to each other through civil formations. In this sense, we can both claim that it is generally valuable that ethics and politics relate to each other through civility and still maintain the intuition that it is not necessarily uncivil to practice, for instance, moral norms of politeness at a social dinner without somehow relating this to politics.

As a second interpretation, it is also possible to characterize incivility as a way of being normative that contains internal conflict but is still wrong judged from an external moral perspective. This interpretation, which I consider the most persuasive of the two, entails that we cannot determine with certainty from within an (in)civil formation whether it can be justified and thus be considered as civil – or instead the exact opposite. Regarding the previously discussed examples, this also means that we, for instance, may consider both the examples of 'stealing oneself' in the trial of the slave Hans Jonathan and Count Rostópchin's decision to sacrifice a political prisoner in *War and Peace* as instances of incivility. That is, they both seem reprehensible as to standards of equality and human rights today even as they simultaneously harbor a potential for self-critique and thereby reconsideration. If we opt for this latter interpretation, there must be something valuable about incivility *even at its worst* because it can bring about a moral and political change for the better. The mode of normativity that both civility and incivility express is thus still, at least to a minimal degree, valuable even if we are completely in the wrong because what we consider to be civil is rather the exact opposite. To judge whether a certain practice is civil or uncivil requires both a reference to established values such as equality or decency as well as some assessment of whether an (un)civil formation is in alignment with such values. A benefit to such an interpretation is that this also makes it possible that there can be instances of (in)civility as a mode of normativity that

are not clearly civil or uncivil since this is part of what is developing through internal conflict.[50] Thus, we are not forced to divide all (in)civil practices that we evaluate into two separate boxes.

Such a continuous development of both civility and incivility also relates to the analyses within the first part where I pointed to the possibility of theorizing civility as a more dynamic relation between ethics and politics through a focus on liberal and critical theoretical conceptions. On this basis, I have developed such a new conception *progressively* through the four chapters within the second part of the thesis leading to the final presentation in this chapter. In the first two chapters in the second part, I suggested that internal conflict can be conceived as being at the very core of civility and its continuous development within an ethico-political context through more in-depth discussions of both the boundaries of civility and incivility as well as Edward Shils and Geneviève Souillac's conceptions. Thereafter, Étienne Balibar's conception of civility has been presented and discussed to draw 'lessons' from a clear example of a broad ontological perspective on civility. However, there also arose certain issues in the analysis of Balibar's far-reaching framework that interprets civility as an antiviolent metapolitics that is somehow related to transformation and emancipation as two other key political concepts. The main issue in the context of this thesis is that Balibar only develops an ontopolitical conception without *a more autonomous role for ethics*.

In the last chapter, I have therefore presented and argued for my own conception of civility that is partly inspired by Étienne Balibar and partly builds upon the results from the previous parts of the thesis. First, I developed the idea that civility can be interpreted as not only metapolitical but also *metaethical* in the sense that it affects the boundaries and constitution of both politics and ethics. Thereafter, I focused on the ways that it does so by arguing for an interpretation of civility as a mode of normativity characterized by internal conflict and thus a dynamic between conflicting commitments and aspirations, even though it also often contains a 'substantial' urge to overcome its own division. In other words, *constantly dividing itself in a conflictual way* is the process that distinguishes civility from politics and ethics. Simply put, to be civil implies to be internally divided in one way or the other, even though this does not mean that civility is only an 'inner struggle' within our own minds. As shown, the internal conflict of civility also develops through,

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[50] Such a notion of (in)civility can furthermore be compared to my analysis of Chesire Calhoun's conception of civility as a capacity to communicate moral attitudes. That is, if this capacity is not necessarily the same as truly being moral this seems to entail that the boundary between civility and incivility can also become blurred. But at least in my interpretation, Calhoun still claims that this capacity is civil *even if it sometimes becomes immoral*.

for instance, conflicting behavior *between* people in a social setting or conflicting interpretations of the same principle *between* groups that interact somehow. In this sense, civility often if not always develops between individuals and collectives. In the third and final section of this chapter, I have proposed and argued for the claim that what is valuable about civility as such a continuous development is that it tends to facilitate reflection that can help us to both rethink and 'reenact' the relation between ethics and politics. In one sense, both ethics and politics are prior to civility since the latter depends on their emergence and co-existence. However, from another perspective this theoretical framework also puts civility on *the same level as ethics and politics* because it is not just derivative of neither. Civility is neither a regional ethics nor a certain type of politics. Even though civility does resemble ethics and politics at once, it is its own distinct mode of normativity. Civility is the internally split mode of normativity that always develops between ethics and politics.

This reconceptualization of civility does not merely draw inspiration from Étienne Balibar but also from other theorists that have been discussed in this thesis. Other conceptions also point to some relation between ethics and politics, but these most often imply a more static relation in which a set of moral norms provides the basis and regulating framework of political conflict. Particularly liberal conceptions tend to interpret civility in this way, even though they also differ in their assessment of whether or why civility is a valuable form of political ethics. Some conceptions also include self-reflection and, at least to some degree, internal conflict as a part of civil practices such as Carole Gayet-Viaud's pragmatist account of civility as the constant testing of norms for citizens' conduct in public spaces. However, what particularly distinguishes this conception from others is that it posits the development of internal conflict within normative orientations at the core. This means that the conceptual scope for civility as a mode of normativity seems to become *broader* in the sense that it is, for instance, not limited to the relations between members of a society or behavioral norms in public space. However, it is also *narrower* in another sense since many of the norms that we often associate with civility such as polite manners are in fact not civil if they do not exhibit a dynamic where internally conflicting parts of the same practice develop it over time.

In this conception, it is important both to distinguish civility from ethics and politics as well as to acknowledge continuities between them. From a political point of view, the formations of civility resemble a form of 'proto-politics' because of their internal conflict, even though they lack the established and open space that politics implies. But, in contrast to the metaphor of civility as the

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'other scene' of politics, there is no scene or staging of civility in this conception. That is, while politics stages normative problems, civility *evolves* such problems and conflict through itself and its formations. The open space of politics is not itself a normative orientation that contains internal conflict but a space that facilitates and regulates conflict between positions, perspectives, and often also clearly separate actors, who might even claim that they have nothing in common. If we remain with the spatial metaphors, this can also be formulated as a difference between politics as an open space for conflict and civility as *a more closed space*, a 'room', for the same. But civility also resembles a 'proto-ethics'; an established normative practice that is just not as coherent as other forms of ethics. However, the underlying aim of the analyses and use of examples has been to show that *civility is its own creature*. In other words, while tensions and contradictions can exist in both politics and ethics, civility is as such its own tension. That we can also interpret the concept of civility as being either more political or more ethical does help to explain why it is that civility is conceived in so different ways in theoretical discussions. But there is a difference between a mutual influence between ethics and politics as still separate practices and civility conceived as a distinct way of mediating between ethics and politics. From the latter perspective, civility develops these two modes of normativity by *continuously forming their tension-full relation to one another*.

CONCLUSION:
CIVILITY TROUBLE

While working on this thesis, I have wondered several times whether it would be fruitful to resort to a neologism such as 'imcivility' to conceive the aspect of internal conflict within civility in a similar manner as Roberto Esposito does to politics with his category of the 'impolitical'. That is, if the concept of civility today mainly connotes a *suturing*, an already established whole, between different parts such as those of politics and ethics, a conceptual approach more oriented to societal change and internal dynamic, sensitive to the gaps in-between, might perhaps be strengthened by recourse to an invented concept without an inheritance of different associations. Conceptual activism through the invention of neologisms can furthermore contribute to the general framing of public discussions. However, I believe that both parts of the dissertation have showed that such a step is not necessary to take; that the elements or 'building blocks' to reconceptualize civility are already there, and that we only need to rethink and reconfigure these elements to arrive at the far-reaching conception that I have presented. In this conclusion, the various contributions and aspects of my project will be elaborated on. I will therefore, at first, recapitulate and reflect upon the *meaning* of civility as a certain mode of normativity that has been developed throughout the whole thesis. After this, some broader perspectives on the *relevance* of such an interpretation will also be highlighted – perspectives that are related to the previous discussion on the value of civility in the second part of the thesis. In this regard, I will focus on the various ways that my conception of civility provides a new theoretical approach to politics and ethics conceived as two distinct but both important modes of normativity and as practices that are quite often connected to each other.

So, what can be said to constitute the main results of this thesis? As follows, it is possible to distinguish between three related theoretical contributions. These are that civility can be conceived as 1) A type of normative orientation that develops through internal conflict, 2) A distinct mode of normativity that constitutes the relation between politics and ethics, and 3) A potential site for critical reflection on ethico-political issues. The first is the perspective that most clearly warrants a neologism such as 'imcivility' since this differs from so many other conceptions of civility as being an established societal order that we can almost immediately evaluate as positive or negative. My suggestion is that we can also meaningfully conceive and evaluate civility by taking a step

back and follow the continuous development of different formations of civility throughout time and space. However, this does not entail that each of these formations should not also be discussed by liberals, critical theorists, and others who engage with ways of assessing what it means to be civil. Civility is never neutral in the sense that it always involves specific 'configurations' of right and wrong; normative settings that can be both disputed and accepted. The importance of civility is not just a question about its repeated occurrence – since civility can potentially emerge whenever ethics and politics co-exist – but also one about how we relate to it *with a reflective approach*.

As the reader might have noticed, the three results listed above cannot easily be separated from each other. The result about internal conflict as inherent to civility is posited as the first one since it functions as *a presupposition* for conceiving civility as a dynamic relation between ethics and politics. With this in mind, we can thereby interpret as civil the different ways that many normative practices seem to be internally conflictual as when we talk about the ambiguities of citizenship, equality hypocrisy, or the dilemmas of freedom. Within a research context, this also provides a theoretical framework for analyzing these matters and not simply focusing on more consistent practices. Overall, this project can thus be understood as the presentation and elaboration of *a more advanced vocabulary* meant to conduct such critical investigations, discussions, and reflections. Throughout the dissertation, I have mainly included simpler and more easily understandable examples of civility to elucidate and discuss the theoretical issues as clearly as possible. But with this theoretical framework in place, I have also made it possible to examine more complex and not as easily recognizable formations of civility. In what sense can, for instance, the complex history and various practices of *democracy* be described as civil or uncivil? And how about *nationalism* as a long-lasting tradition of both theory and practice that seems just as complex as democracy?

The second result implicates that we need an idea of what both ethics and politics imply to grasp civility as a mode of normativity that is *in-between*. Being in-between does not mean that civility must be characterized as a combination of, for instance, a particular ethics such as a communicative virtue and a political framework such as a model of citizenship since this would still reduce civility to a given formation. In my conception, civility always emerges in a context where ethics and politics co-exist, even if it is still irreducible to both. But, as I emphasized in the methodological chapter, this implies that *continual reflections* upon both politics and ethics as two normative practices can help us to further our understanding of civility and its developments. Oppositely, if

one were to criticize the theoretical framework of the thesis this could possibly be done by questioning whether ethics and politics constitute so far-reaching and yet identifiable modes of normativity as I propose – and if there might also be other modes of normativity relevant to an account of civility. Can theology, for instance, argue for a wholly different perspective on civility?[51] Since ethics and politics are concepts that have emerged within a Western context, it is probably fruitful to include theoretical approaches that are, at least partly, non-Western in these reflections. However, it is important to note that any different vocabulary or language does not by itself contradict insights that are reached within the language that I have used. Just as with an approach that analyzes civility between traditions, this requires *a discussion between languages.*

A newly developed vocabulary that might shed more light on civility can be found in the various strands and theories that are loosely connected through the term 'new materialisms'. My elaborated framework is open to different interpretations of civility from both a materialist and an idealist perspective. Just as there are already ways of investigating aspects of ethico-political practices as materially embedded, as formed through both human and non-human matter such as technology or biological and ecological processes, it must also be possible to develop a richer vocabulary of how civility 'matters' – that is, how it evolves actively *through* matter. For instance, Lenny Moss' notion of "natural detachment" might provide a way to understand and investigate further how the internal conflict within civility is not just something that happens 'inside our heads' but from another point of view involves *detachments* between various types of matter such as differences within behavioral gestures, bodily movements, and technological artifices (Moss, 2017, p. 236). In relation to such an approach, Karen Barad's neologism "intraaction" can also be fruitful to emphasize the idea that the internally conflicting parts of civility are not preestablished and separate from each other but are rather interconnected and dynamic parts that 'intraact' together. Such a new materialist vocabulary might thus contribute to *a more perceptive analysis of civility.*

A more perceptive analysis can probably also be developed through the inclusion of approaches and insights from other relevant theoretical traditions such as phenomenology, structuralism, and

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[51] It also seems that skepticism of the use of both ethics and politics as categories is often *theologically founded* by reference to a transcendental dimension that a secular perspective on ethics and politics as practices that are immanent to this world and time cannot capture. For instance, Emmanuel Levinas problematized at times 'ethics' in favour of more theological concepts such as holiness and saintliness to characterize a sacred confrontation with "the face of the Other", which for Levinas obliges us to become responsible beings (Bernasconi, 1997, p. 59).

psychoanalysis. In turn, this reconceptualization of civility might also develop such traditions further by providing a new way to interpret the relation between ethics and politics. For instance, it remains a recurring problem within democratic theory that citizens do not seem to easily change their values and commitments despite being repeatedly confronted with something that we, at least as observers, believe should change their minds. As a response to this, it is easy either to resort to external delimitations of democracy by, for instance, excluding those *inflexible citizens* who lack certain cognitive capacities or to maintain a belief in the democratic possibilities of an 'inner revolution' that might emerge in even the most obstinate citizen if we are all capable of changing our worldview given the right circumstances. However, the discussions thus tend towards an 'all-or-nothing' logic: Either we believe that what Charles Taylor calls *radical reevaluation*, a stance of openness towards oneself and one's values, is achievable for everyone or we consider this as deluded and argue that we must instead make severe adjustments to the democratic ideal itself. The problem changes in character, though, if we also interpret this as *a disconnect between ethics and politics*; a lack of mediation between our ethical values and the political context that questions the very same values. As I argued in the second part of the thesis, civility can be seen as valuable in this regard because it repeatedly provides such a mediation by facilitating critical reflection through its dialectical developments. That is, civility might not result in any 'inner revolution' but, as a mode of normativity characterized by internal conflict, it can help us to confront tensions between our values, commitments, and practices. In this sense, civility might also help to expand the democratic sphere through *a more continuous reevaluation*, which is not simply all-or-nothing.

With this reconceptualization of civility, we can also develop new interpretations of concepts such as civil society and civil disobedience. As discussed earlier in the thesis, today the notion of civil society implies a societal sphere that is at least partly separated from other spheres. In this context, we can conceive 'civil society' as that societal sphere in which there is given *space and freedom to be conflicted about normative problems* and where it is, at least to some degree, accepted that practices, discourses, and principles often become tension-full and thus contain within them interpretations that conflict with each other. If a certain public sphere is to be characterized as a civil society on this conception and not simply a political arena or perhaps the site for expressions of a cultural ethos, it must also provide a setting to develop *inherently conflictual normative orientations* through not just individuals' own thoughts but in an 'experimental' space that is open

for doubt and confusion. From an empirical perspective, this might be quite a demanding task, but if this is the case we can at least focus on those few cases where such a civil society could exist.

In this regard, it might be the case that what many theorists conceive as 'political society' cannot easily become a part of this form of civil society. As earlier discussed in the thesis, Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato argue that actors such as political parties, trade unions, and governments most often follow agendas about both power and money that cannot fit into their notion of a civil society. On a conception of civil society that is about facilitating an encouraging space for developing and inquiring into internal conflict about normative issues, this is presumably a more open question. Perhaps, certain open forums for dialogue within political parties or governmental councils of a more explorative and experimental character can provide this kind of 'civil platform'. However, if they instead counteract the development of such a civil society this does not necessarily relate to their role as political actors. It might also be that they are *too ethical*; that their public agendas are so entrenched in certain moral norms expressed through their ideologies and political programs that there is nearly no room left for internal conflict and continuous reflection on what that means.

Similarly, civil disobedience can be reconceived as well as a certain practice of law-breaking, or 'norm-breaking', that is conflictual in its normative orientation and thereby its justifications for acting so. As with civil society, this must also imply that civil disobedience is not necessarily identified with requirements such as non-violence, respect, and non-evasiveness that we otherwise associate with being civilly disobedient – requirements that can be highly important to practice and value in various political situations. However, if we assume that there are different formations of civil disobedience such as a form that particularly stresses the value of non-violence we can still conceive such formations as being civil on this account if they, for instance, include continuous discussion and reflection amongst disobedient actors on the principles they proclaim to follow. For instance, it would thus be an integral part of non-violent civil disobedience to keep it as *an open question* what non-violence requires one to do such as whether it prohibits the destruction of personal property. In this sense, civil disobedience is a form of disobedience that is *in conflict with itself* about its normative basis even while maintaining that it does rely on some normative standards. On this account, civil disobedience is a peculiar type of principled disobedience since its principles and values remain an open question even for the civil disobedient actors themselves.

However, since there are also pragmatic purposes for selecting and developing specific conceptions of civil society and civil disobedience, this type of conception that replaces a focus on distinct ethical and political features such as non-violence with an emphasis on internal conflict should not be considered as a competitor to, or critique of, other conceptions. It is rather meant to be considered as a relevant contribution – whose more full and systematic development lies outside the bounds of this thesis – to a broader theoretical discussion about the various meanings and purposes of talking about both civil society and civil disobedience. The main purpose in this context is to also locate and interpret these concepts within the relation between ethics and politics.

In an article on politeness and civility, Maria Sifianou mentions that there is no word in Greek popular parlance to render the English word 'civil' (Sifianou, 2019). As she puts it, the only equivalent is the infrequently used *κόσμιος* ("kósmios"), which is derived from the Ancient Greek term *κόσμος* ("kósmos") that means not only the universe as such but also order, harmony, and good behavior. Not surprisingly, 'kósmios' also denotes a type of conduct that many would designate as orderly, decent, and appropriate with respect to the social context. In this regard, that Sifianou interprets such a term as equivalent to civility shows quite clearly how counterintuitive it may be to many not only Native English but also foreign speakers to reinterpret civility as being inherently conflictual and thereby *disorderly* because it does not constitute one coherent entity. However, today it also seems that quite a few theorists describe civility in a manner that comes close to this approach, even though not everyone states this explicitly or incorporates dynamic aspects of civility into a more systematic theorization. For instance, Andrew Peterson characterizes civility in a more conventional manner as being a civic virtue for democratic participation but nevertheless speculates whether it might be in a state of "perpetual crisis"; whether civility has always been up for discussion and under threat from different sides (Peterson, 2019, p. 6). But when we thereby talk about civility as in decline or even in crisis, the societal diagnosis is usually concerned with opposing forces *threatening civility from the outside*. What I propose is instead that it also makes sense to conceive of civility as being in a state of 'perpetual crisis' from the inside due to its internal dynamic, which cannot simply be transferred onto an alleged threat from foreign forces that destabilize a previous state of harmony. To paraphrase Judith Butler's notion of gender trouble in this context, this thesis might thereby give rise to at least some degree of *civility trouble* by suggesting that we can also consider civility as something 'troubling' by itself.

As earlier mentioned in the conclusion, this perspective on civility is related to the conceptual approach. In this connection, one of G. W. F. Hegel's various ways of characterizing a 'concept' is that of a "self-moving circle" (Hegel, 1977, p. 37). Two points of relevance can be drawn from such a metaphor without following a Hegelian system of thought. First, both within ethico-political thought as elsewhere it applies that a concept is not only confined to the role of identifying a fixed entity. Quite oppositely, any concept has also the capacity to facilitate *a continuous movement of thought* that if not mirrors then at least resonates on an ongoing basis with whatever we conceive as its point of reference. Contrary to a limitation of the concept to a sort of theoretical 'still life', my approach has been to insist that civility also makes sense as a self-moving concept in the sense that it can respond to historical developments; in other words, that it can move with history itself. Of course, being self-moving cannot literally mean that a concept becomes a living organism but, in this context, it can still signify *an in-built responsiveness*. Any discussion of its normative significance, therefore, does not need a once-and-for-all conclusion that civility is either good or bad. Evaluating civility as both a concept and a phenomenon can also imply that the discussion is more open-ended. However, the second point of relevance is that even though such a movement seems interminable, we do not need to succumb to the conclusion that civility thus becomes a too vague or contested concept for theoretical uses. In this regard, the idea that the concept of civility can also become a 'circle' implies that it is still possible for us to portray some *circularity*; a structuring of certain elements where each can move one another. If 'circularity' can only be a closed system, we might also characterize this as a more open *spirality*. Without losing sight of its historical embeddedness along the way, I have provided such a conceptual portrayal in the second part with my characterization of civility as a mode of normativity in-between ethics and politics.

So, does this reconceptualization constitute a meaningful civil ontology? This depends once again on our notion of what 'ontology' means. Already in the introduction to the thesis, I proposed that we do not need to conceive ontology as an all-encompassing and clearly defined system, but that we can instead understand an ontological endeavor as *a continually broadening development of thought*. However, it might still be true that one needs to cross certain 'thresholds' to practice civil ontology. Michel Serres once said that an engaged thinker is one who exhibits an interpenetration between her thought and "the philosophical life" that, in Serres' view, includes an experience with particularly science but also society, nature, and the world in general (Serres & Latour, 1995, p. 126). According to Serres, engagement implies that one becomes a "total thinker" who have

experienced everything – who have seen, heard, and thought it all. From a commonsensical perspective, this is obviously impossible and perhaps also a misguided regulative ideal of a closed totality that could be uncovered once and for all. Nevertheless, my hope is that this thesis can still be characterized as engaged – or even an 'engaged ontology' – in a similar sense of being open and theoretically sensitive towards the far-reaching implications of interpreting civility through its various aspects. That is, the *broadening gesture* throughout the thesis has been oriented towards providing relevant interpretations and analyses that can continually bind this peculiar concept together in a more comprehensive and far-reaching manner. To do so, I have both analyzed and discussed conceptions from particularly liberalism and critical theory as well as selected examples from literature, history, and the social sciences. Given that there is no endpoint for this approach, such a gesture can also be developed further by anyone if *even more civil ontology* is to follow.

Amongst the many conceptions discussed in this thesis, a particularly noticeable one is Melanie White's interpretation of civility as constitutively ambivalent and thus also conflictual because it in White's account both reinforces and ameliorates hierarchical distinctions. One might say that the proposed reconceptualization takes such an approach a step further by suggesting that internal conflict within normative orientations, regardless of what it is that is conflicting with each other, can by itself be conceived as the defining feature of civility. In this relation, an often quoted saying by Mao Zedong, which is probably a misquote, is that Mao supposedly said in connection with the civil war in China: "There is great disorder under heaven – the situation is excellent". In other words, the 'great disorder' provides an excellent opportunity for a revolutionary change that might bring about the great new societal order that we aspire to. In contrast to this, I do not presuppose that the disorder of civility is excellent. But it does provide an opportunity to change for the better through a reflexive mediation between two partly separate modes of normativity. Civility *is* indeed a deep confusion, but it is sometimes only by going through such confusion that we can realize higher aspirations and perhaps even a 'great new order' in *the ethico-political world of tomorrow*.

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What is the relation between ethics and politics?

This question is baffling in its reach and is yet clearly relevant to our contemporary society. If ethics is about establishing normative practices, 'taming' normativity, while politics is about developing normative conflicts through an organized space, how do these two connect – if they do so at all?

In this thesis, Andreas Beyer Gregersen reinterprets the concept of civility as a novel interpretation key to the relation between ethics and politics. On this account, civility *is* the dynamic in-between, a third way of being normative characterized by internal conflict, that connects ethics and politics.

Civility is often conceived by theorists as a standard of political ethics, but it is also a contested concept that for others points to questionable norms that can exclude marginalized groups in society and prevent progressive change from happening. Through the development of a new conception of civility, Gregersen shows that the concept can reach further than these discussions and point to the relation between ethics and politics as such. The proposed name for such a far-reaching theoretical interpretation is civil ontology.