

Do Policemen Dream of Democracy?

The 'Theatre of the Normal' of the New Radical Right

Versus the Democratic Theatre of Dispute

Thomas Crombez

SUMMARY. There is a fault-line in the philosophy of the New Right, running along the theme of force and violence. On the one hand, New Right politicians advocate the right to autarchic self-defense. On the other hand, they call for more authority for police and other groups to which force is delegated. By analysing this fault-line conceptually, it is possible to get to the heart of a dichotomy in the democratic state. This dichotomy goes back to the earliest democratic conceptions in Athens, and Aristotle's *Politics* helps to illustrate the dialectic of the concepts which constitute the logic of self-reflexivity. With this analysis in hand, it is possible to revisit the theatrical crux of democracy, and its basis in the possibility of an open theatre of contestation.

1) The aim of this article is to present a defense of democracy by way of fixing its essential theatricality. In keeping with Claude Lefort, I define democratic theatricality as the 'theatre of dispute'. This figure can be developed in detail by comparison with another which has recently appeared in the political thought of American conservatism, and the New Radical Right in Europe. The dramaturgy of this other figure, which we may call 'the theatre of the normal', is manifest together with a significant fault-line in the programme of these movements: contradictory notions of the use of force. On the one hand, there is an appeal to intensify the delegation of violence in society to a governmental monopoly of force, while on the other hand there is an abiding and pugnacious defense of autarchic force. In my conclusion I will critique both these agenda points (paragraphs 13-16). To that end, it is necessary first to give this fault-line a broader conceptualisation (paragraphs 2-7). Second, I will reduce this contradiction to a more pure ambiguity from the political context and thought of the 5th century B.C. in Athens (paragraphs 8-9). I ground the

duality of delegation and autarchy in the definition of the slave given by Aristotle in his *Politics* (paragraph 10). The dialectic of these concepts constitutes an instrumental logos resulting in self-reflexivity. It is nothing short of crucial for the democratic form of government. The fault-line in the New Right and conservative position on force, which is our starting-point, is not merely a sore spot in current politics, but can serve as a prompt for a renewed determination of the essence of democracy. The Aristotelian description of democracy will then be traded in for a contemporary model derived from Lefort and Jacques Derrida (paragraphs 11-12). This model however remains based on the specific Aristotelian concept of instrumental rationality. Thereby, I set up a politico-philosophical framework both to legitimate and defend the democratic theatre of dispute (paragraphs 15-16), and to reveal the double conception of force in the New Right and conservative outlook. This duality drives both a blind faith in the ‘armoured model’ of force, and an illusory and dangerous ideal of armed autarchy (paragraphs 13-14).

2) On the question of security, the proposals of the various European parties which have been dubbed the New Radical Right¹ seems perfectly straightforward: more money for police forces and prisons, increased police presence on the street, expanded authority and less administrative work for police officers. It would appear as if the police are crucial to the New Right’s answer to those problems that constitute its ‘unique selling proposition’ to voters who increasingly think of themselves as consumers of a political product: petty crime, trouble caused by resident foreigners, and illegal immigration. From the support these political parties enjoy among police officers it might also seem as though there is an unbreakable romance between the New Right and the police. But in fact there is a spanner in the works. Another, less-emphatic plank in the New Right’s platform is support for the rights to private gun-ownership, and to lawful self-defense. The argument for a society of citizens prepared to take up arms to defend themselves as individuals or as a social corps (e.g., as

family, region, nation or “people”) is, in some of the party platforms, rather vague. The Front National in France speaks only of awakening the “*esprit de défense*” amongst the French. But there are also much more concrete proposals: the Flemish Interest (Vlaams Belang) in Belgium advocate expanding the legal sanction of self-defense to private property².

3) That there is indeed a fault-line within the New Right mentality becomes evident once we conceptualise the dissonant points of the programme. On the one hand there is talk of intensifying the delegation of the force to be invested in defense of the citizens. The moment the citizen cedes the resort to force to the government is fundamental to the establishment of the modern constitutional state. It goes to what Max Weber described as the “State’s monopoly on force”³. With the New Right parties, Weber’s definition of the constitutional state swells up to become a guiding policy principle capable of solving all sorts of problems. The police then form an instrumentalised force which, in keeping with a naïve social-Darwinist logic, is charged with tending an outward-facing barrier against the criminal, or at least illegal Others. In a sense, the use of force by the policeman is commodified in the shape of his uniform, his strictly-prescribed right to bear arms, and his code. He is an arms-bearer, paid for the violent duties he discharges. The defense against hostile elements is conceived according to the outward-turned model of a suit of armour, or fortified wall. The difference between the delegation of force and its execution allows the former to be preserved in all its peaceableness. This in part explains the beaming cheerfulness of the families seen on New Right parties’ campaign posters, and at the festive events they organise. If a homogenised group of residents is protected against the outside by the police shield, then within the charmed circle, they may enjoy a festive image of themselves, as if they were united in a ‘theatre of the normal’. The New Right has not as yet broken free of Marx’ communal description — “security is the highest social concept of bourgeois society”⁴ — but adds the nuance of a persistent staging of the enclavists, for the

enclavists: the representation of a security-fantasy for those who are forever defending themselves.

4) This peaceful sort of individual, delegating away his resort to force, corresponds to just one facet of the inconsistent mindset of the New Right. On the other hand, there is the facet of the freedom fighter, prepared to take up arms to defend his liberty. This is an internalised protection, on the model of a skill or therapy. Only by taking up arms within the orderly structure of the individual or social corps can he fend off foreign, anarchic violence. There is no difference between the delegating and active components of force on this model. The armed citizen, united with his homogeneous fellows in the neighbourhood watch group, is self-sovereign over force and by the use of force, and is not a delegate arms-bearer, but an autarch. This arms-bearer literally rules over himself (*auto-arbeiten*) by taking up arms. A first implication is that he knows how to control himself, and his weapon. Secondly, thanks to his weapon, he requires no external protection; he is self-sufficient. The New Right parties are not only proponents of an expanded right to self-defense and of a vigilant citizenry, they are often linked by historic ties to nationalist and paramilitary movements⁵ and are in support of district and village surveillance networks.

5) After this preliminary conceptualisation of the fault-line between delegate and autarchic arms-bearers, we should give some indications about the transatlantic context. Central to the foreign policy of the United States of America under President George W. Bush is an expansionist idea which seeks to spread a political, economic and technological system, and thereby make conscious use of various forms of delegated force. The hydra-headed network within which this process must be organised is inscrutable. In Iraq, the American army provides the same services guarding Halliburton's installations as would private security firms. And these in turn are actively deployed in implementing policies. CSC/DynCorp for example renders a variety of services to the American government, in

particular of the (para)military kind: the defoliation of cocaine fields in Columbia, training justices of the peace in Iraq, and seeing to the personal security of President Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan. Even completely foreign elements are entrusted with important tasks: the hunt for Osama Bin Laden was farmed out to Afghan warlords. To circumvent their own laws regarding torture, it appears as if the CIA brings prisoners suspected of terrorism to no man's land locations such as the military bases in Guantánamo Bay (Cuba) or Diego Garcia (an island in the Indian Ocean under the dominion of the UK), rather than to the US. In other cases, prisoners are sent to countries where counterterrorist operations are carried out (e.g. to the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq) or to more or less friendly states such as Uzbekistan or Syria. When vital information is obtained by means of torture by anonymous guards, the argument is offered, that it would be immoral not to use this information in the defense of western civilians, regardless of how it was obtained⁶. The State's monopoly on force has attained such a degree of complexity and opacity, that the difference has blurred between that force entrusted to private hands, and that which remains a public concern and therefore submitted to public control.

6) There is not only an expanded and opaque tangle of agents to whom force has been delegated. The techniques have also changed. Darius Rejali has asserted that the techniques used in Abu Ghraib such as sexual humiliation and sustained binding in painful positions are a part of stealth torture, which leaves few traces⁷. Stealth torture techniques such as electroshocks, sleep deprivation, water and noise torture are spreading globally. The torturer knows that the evidence of his torture is destroyed, and that the victim cannot point to scars in evidence of his torment. Thus is stealth torture an extreme variant of the commodification of violence. The delegating method exceeds its purpose, rendering the violence that is produced so transparent that the product disappears. At the same time, the 'theatre of violence' necessary for torture in the old sense disappears.

The objective is no longer to exhibit the tortured victims (or their corpses) to the public in order to create terror⁸.

7) At the heart of the American Right there is a movement wishing to renounce the delegating method. The pioneering spirit of America is incarnate in a staggering 250 million firearms attributed for 295 million people. Approximately 39% of households have at least one gun. A pioneer outlook and widespread gun ownership have also crystallised a political way of thinking, promulgated by organisations such as the National Rifle Association of America (NRA) and many smaller cores of ‘freedom fighters’ such as Gunsite, the shooting school run by gun guru Jeff Cooper. Such armed autarchs enthusiastically cite the Second Amendment of the American Constitution:

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

The crux of their rationale is the bridge spanning on the one side Thomas Jefferson’s historic concern that a number of capable members of society should be able to form a civilian force in case of danger, and on the other side the generalisation of this notion in their latter-day motto, casting a thoroughly militarised society as the ideal: “An armed society is a polite society” (Robert Heinlein). To them the dream of setting up business and industrial zones in lands rich in resources and development potential, protected not by the constituents of these zones but by delegates, from a very different, meta-level market, is incomprehensible. (This is a primarily domestic market, comprising the Army, federal security agencies, PMCs (Private Military Companies) and other security firms, and arms makers⁹.) Typical of this attitude is a remark in Jeff Cooper’s monthly Web commentary, to the effect that those who fell victim to kidnapping had mostly themselves to blame: “You should not be caught unarmed and you should be alert at all times”¹⁰. In a war-zone each citizen must also be a soldier – though September 11, 2001 has made it

conceivable to regard the whole world as such. Cooper cannot understand the global bonanza pursued by unarmed individuals under the protection of professionals. He denigrates the security agents used by the government as mere hirelings: “the federal ninja drive around in their black uniforms and face masks”¹¹. The contrast is starkest between the do-it-yourself ethos of the armed autarchs, typical of the radical American Right, but also present in the European New Right, and the general market outlook floating on the surface of the New Right parties’ platform. In Austria, the *Freiheitspartei Österreichs* (FPÖ) literally speaks of the “security needs” (*Sicherheitsbedürfnis*) of the citizenry, to be met by the government through a “security executive” (*Sicherheitsexekutive*) using the most advanced scientific and technological means¹². In a further conceptualisation, we will treat on this crux upon a more abstract plane. First, the groundwork must be completed, however. Following the preliminary conceptualisation, and political contextualisation, we will give a historical framing of the striking fault-line in the New Right and conservative platform.

8) In the political history of the West, we first meet this fault-line in its original form, which is to say as an organic synthesis of the two tendencies which have been presented hitherto in this paper as conflicting. Athens in the 5th century before Christ was the archetypal example of delegated force. From colonies to the north of the Black Sea were brought Scythian slaves who, presumably on account of their physical strength and skill with weapons, were employed as ‘police officers’ to keep the peace in the city during public assemblies (*ekklesia*, 6000 citizens in attendance), the city council (*boulê*, 500) or trials (juries of 201 to 2001). Many questions remain unanswered about their precise identity and powers, but an important fact is that the Scythians (*Skythai*) or archers (*toxotai*), as they were depicted, fulfilled their (apparently lightly-)armed function as chattel of the city-state¹³. The purchase of the Scythians as slaves demonstrates explicitly the objectification of force which occurs with delegation. Objectification means in a certain sense the ‘death’ of the corpus within which the force

is objectified. The delegate can under no circumstances defy the delegator. If a slave resisted the injunction to use the whip, he would himself be punished with a whipping¹⁴. The phrasing used by the orators Aeschines and Andocides is revealing: “It was at this time that we first *enrolled* three hundred cavalry and *purchased* three hundred Scythian archers”¹⁵. The crucial distinction lies between the ‘domestic force’ delegated to the barabarian slaves, and military force proper. The (heavily-armed) Greek soldiers or hoplites (from *hopla*, ‘weapons’) and cavalry came mostly from the well-off class, as they were supposed to bear the relatively high costs of outfitting themselves. They were re-inforced with mercenaries and in emergencies with a civilian force. Only in the most extreme necessity of war were the slaves also armed to fight alongside the citizens¹⁶.

9) The fault-line between delegated and autarchic force was, in the Athenian context, merely an ambiguity. Some coercive tasks such as keeping law and order at a busy public assembly or summoning citizens to jury duty, were esteemed as too unimportant, too specialised or too unpleasant for Athenian citizens to take up themselves, much like other tasks set for slaves, from bank administration to prostitution to mining. Other coercive tasks fell within the scope of the citizens’ self-determination, including some which today would be indistinguishable from certain police or judicial responsibilities. It was understood that citizens could defend themselves against street crime. They also took charge of the prosecution in the event they were attacked. They gathered witnesses and were responsible for the ‘criminal investigation’. But the members of the jury, the magistrates who carried out arrests and executions were also drawn from the community of male Athenian citizens. The decisions as to which measure of force to farm out, and which to keep in private hands, seem to have been made as a matter of course.

10) In the chapter on slavery in the first book of Aristotle’s *Politics* there is an opportunity to lay bare the deeper problem of our crux by analysing

the synthesis of delegation and autarchy. This fundamental passage in western political philosophy posits a continuum of natural social entities, beginning with the simplest forms of community (*koinoonia*), such as the relation of soul and body in a man, or between man and wife or master and slave in a house. Following these is the village and finally the city-state (*polis*). The typical Aristotelian movement is between analysis and synthesis. The Philosopher sketches thereby the relations between soul and body, man and wife, and citizens and city. He dissects these relations into their parts and applies a hierarchy according to the governing part (*archos*) and the governed part (*archomenon*): the soul rules over the body, the man over the wife, the master over the slave, the king over his subjects or the citizens over one another, according to various forms of government. So while the soul rules despotically over the body, within the soul the intellect rules “with a political [i.e., constitutional] and royal rule” over the desires (1254b4-5). The idea that different forms of community need their own polities has entered the history of political thought as the principle of subsidiarity. At the same time, this analysis, which seems inclined towards fixed allocations of power and to dissociations, is compensated by a synthesis. The first paragraphs of the *Politics* set out to draw a qualitative distinction between the different levels of governance, but still they affirm the natural basis of governance on all communal levels, including the highest, the complex entity formed by the *polis*. The relationships within the *polis* are indeed regulated by human convention, but these regulations are announced by nature itself. Thence the famous justification of slavery as necessary and fitting, as it is natural:

[H]e who is by nature not his own but another’s man, is by nature a slave. . . . For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule¹⁷. (1254a14-55a2)

Contemporary commentary is at times too quick to read this postulate as purely analytic, in the sense of a definitive establishment of a determinate

power relationship. Aristotle is very much concerned with the synthetic aspect, the natural status of the power relationship. Slave and master form a natural, complementary whole. It is in the interest of both parties that the relationship is structured this way: the former brings his bodily strength and natural disposition to being led, the latter brings his intellect and foresight to keep both parties alive. It is through the complementarity of the earlier relationships in the continuum that Aristotle can posit that the highest form of communal life, the *polis* aspires to “the end and the best”, namely *autarkeia* or self-sufficiency conjoined with self-governance¹⁸. The slave therefore fulfills an essential role, one might say in explanation and elaboration of Aristotle’s argument. He ‘teaches’ his master the skill of delegation. The delegation process serves for the master as an initiation to instrumental logic. He is on the road to autarchy. The slave enables the master to constitute a political entity which may strive for *autarkeia* via the many relations in which he serves as master, but is also in part caught up and committed. This learning curve comprises an extremely important component of the instrumental *logos*: self-reflexivity. To this too, the slave has the key.

11) Let us for the moment take for granted that Aristotle gives us an idealised picture of what the society of slavery was in reality. Many master-slave relationships were perhaps based more on ‘friendship’ than on brute power – which according to Aristotle is only natural (1255b9-15) – but still the lives of slaves and their families were utterly at the master’s disposal¹⁹. But remaining strictly within the idealised project of Aristotle, an active dialectic is manifest between delegation and autarchy, which can be considered as the foundation of democracy. The very definition of slavery indicates as much (1253b27-54a17). Like the other possessions of his master, the slave serves as an “instrument for maintaining life” (*organon pros zōoēn*). More specifically, he is an animate, rather than inanimate possession. This objectionable formulation is possible, thanks to the radicality with which it considers the delegation process, so funda-

mentally meaningful for the ancient Greeks, as it is for contemporary western democracy. The slave is a special instrument. Strictly speaking, he produces nothing, as compared with say the loom. He is not so much a ‘production instrument’ as an ‘action instrument’. His effects are discernible on a meta-level: he is an *organon pros organoon*, an instrument in the service of other instruments. The instrumental logic which is capable of delegating work and even force to another body, then gives occasion to a valuable self-reflexivity. Aristotle’s definition can be reformulated. Through the meta-instrument that is the slave, the soulless instrument is, as it were, lifted up to self-consciousness. One might say along these lines that through a slave working as a smith inanimate instruments such as the hammer, tongs and anvil, receive the ability to reproduce themselves. The slave can, using these instruments, make a copy or an improved version of them. Put negatively, he can, with these tools destroy other hammers, anvils and tongs. This self-reflexivity is only made possible within the framework of Aristotelian instrumentality, a delegating method with two layers: from master to tool A, the slave, and from the slave to tool B, the smithy. Does this not perhaps form the essence of the democratic government process? By answering this question with reference to the pertinent Athenian institutions, as we know them through Athenian orators and Aristotle himself, we can take a position against Jean-Luc Nancy’s *L’Expérience de la liberté* (1988), wherein he argues that a democratic concept of freedom cannot be grounded on instrumental reason²⁰. As is evident in the way Aristotle takes up the theme of instrumental reason, the concept of the instrument furthers the skill of the delegation. Delegation comprises the concept of an animate, ‘empty’ instrument which in turn makes way for the concept of self-reflexivity. The instrument becomes self-conscious and can perform its functions now not merely outwardly, but upon itself. So, instrumental logic gives to political autarchy a dependable occasion, with which the foundation of democracy lies. The concrete form this took in Athens was a direct democracy²¹.

The various democratic establishments - the public assembly, the city council, and the courts of law – drew their many members from nearly the entire body of older Athenian men, with regular rotations to prevent any group from making too many decisions. One may rightly and reasonably speak of a dominion of the citizens over the citizens, but it is more so a second democratic mechanism which fully embodies self-reflexivity. Democracy is the state form, whereby at any moment a reconsideration may be made of the regulations and foundations of the state form. In the Athenian case, there was an annual *nomothesia* or ‘law giving’. This was an opportunity for every Athenian citizen to propose that a law should be abolished and replaced with another. The *nomothetai*, a group of law-givers chosen from a pool of 6000 jury members, then set up a meta-judicial proto-parliamentary legal review, where ‘advocates’ and ‘plaintiffs’ of the old law could have their say. At the end, a vote was held on the new law, and the new codex of laws was checked for consistency. On a completely different level, Athenian democracy should also be discussed in relation to tragedy, a forum at the heart of the state wherein could be discussed even what posed an explosive threat to the state, such as Antigone’s ‘fundamentalist’ disobedience. The democracy endorses and subsidises a stage on which democracy itself, its transformations and even its destruction can be dramatised.

12) There is therefore a void at the heart of a democracy. This concept has been described by Claude Lefort to oppose the democratic to the totalitarian state, within which one group (the Party) poses as the thorough embodiment of the state²². The totalitarian state strives accordingly for a fusion between itself, and civil society. Symbolically as well as organisationally, the Party sees itself as the only possible system of social reference. Within this conception, there is no call to institutionalise social conflicts. Consequently, the expression of these conflicts is always violent, as was seen in the many uprisings against the regimes of the Eastern Bloc. Against the plenum of the totalitarian social state, the democratic state

leaves an empty space. In the ‘theatre of dispute’ it is rather the separation than the fusion of power and judgement which is raised to a principle. At any point, a contesting social power may lay claim to the public forum, and earn the respect of the rulers.

Jacques Derrida has reformulated this blank space as an “unconditional surrender of sovereignty”²³ and then couples Lefort’s conception to Aristotle’s definition of democracy as a role-reversal or ‘turn-taking system’: “One principle of liberty is for all to rule and be ruled in turn” (1317b). Democratic alternation is literally to be seen as turn-taking, and thus modelled on the figure of the wheel. Derrida takes this word-play to be deadly serious. Self-reflexivity arises in a circular motion, which Derrida calls “ipseity”. Democracy, defined as the ipseity of the people, embodies a circular sovereignty: “La souveraineté est ronde, elle est un arrondissement” – the people finds itself in the round, so as to look at itself²⁴. The parliamentary half-circle betokens an amphitheatrical architecture of government. As a singular state form, democracy conducts a thought experiment within its own structure on its own transformation or even its possible discontinuation.

Democracy is the one kind of regime which accepts its own historicity, and further, its “intrinsic plasticity and interminable self-critique”²⁵ as central. This can generate self-destructive results if for instance the citizens choose to regress – whether or not with open eyes - to an undemocratic form of government, as happened with the election of Adolf Hitler in 1933, leading to a state of emergency and finally the establishment of a totalitarian state. The great problem with democracies is that the “alternatives to democracy can be represented as democratic alternatives”²⁶. Indeed Athens and in its wake the late-modern democracies became marked by an extreme self-reflexivity, if one tempered by certain restrictions. The Athenian democracy placed sanctions on the discussion of certain core laws, which might count as a proto-constitutional structure²⁷. Derrida, resorting to a biological metaphor, calls this process “auto-immunisation”²⁸. An organism too may put its defense mechanisms to the

test, even though these might be wiped out by infection, so that the organism as a whole may survive and then generate a better defense. To forestall antidemocratic tendencies, a democracy can loosen its democratic regulations, which admit of enormous freedoms, by undemocratic means. It annuls a part of its constitution, specifically the measures aimed at preventing dictatorship by one group. Some laws say in effect: ‘it is fundamental that every law may be brought up for renewed discussion, but whosoever questions this law will be subject to sanction’. The aim of this destruction is to hinder the ruination of the whole polity by what grows within the blind spot of democratic protection. Derrida counts as examples the elections in Algeria in 1992, which the government in place did not accept the apparent victory of a fundamentalist islamist party, and also the restrictions of civil liberties under the much-discussed Patriot Act, passed in the US after 9/11. One might easily add to that list the French ban on the wearing of head-scarves in secondary schools, or the Belgian law on racism, which is aimed squarely at New Right parties such as the Vlaams Belang. The New Right dependably replaces the democratic theatre of dispute with a theatre of the normal, in which the citizens establish their homogeneity, to represent and cheer themselves. (This is a theatre which may be ranked in the history of what Nietzsche called with disdain “narcotic theatre”²⁹.) The most apparent sign of this drift is the undemocratic structure of the New Right parties themselves. The research of Herbert Kitschelt found that charismatic leadership figures, and wielding nearly unlimited power within the party, and a bureaucratic party structure to be amongst the few genuine commonalities between the New Right parties and the fascist movements of the 1920s and 30s. Through the profiles cut by highly visible leading figures, New Right parties can quickly play to new target demographics, such as the charm offensive launched by the Vlaams Belang to court conservative Catholics with the moral hard-liner Alexandra Colen. Or the ideological revolution from pan-German nationalism to the “Austria first” motto of the FPÖ under Jorg Haider’s leadership. At the same time, the absence of a bureaucratic

chain of command ensures the maximal visibility of internal conflicts, should these arise³⁰.

13) The fault-line within the New Right and conservative platforms as concerns delegated and autarchic force relates to a limited political problem. When put back in touch with the historical and philosophical source of the instrumental logic of the West, we can be provoked to a renewed definition of the essence of democracy today. Now, from within this redefinition, there must needs be a reformulated critique of the transformations of instrumental rationality caused by New Right and conservative ideas. The first and most important target of this critique should be the illusory and dangerous ideal of armed autarchy. There is an apparent lacuna in the precious self-reflexive mechanism. It is precisely a matter of the status of weapons. This lacuna can provide crucial information for the evaluation of New Right and American-conservative positions towards force. As was indicated, the Scythian police-slaves serve as the archetype for instrumentalised force. Orlando Patterson has asserted to this that slavery was conceived as a substitute for death. Most slaves were acquired during wars, or were accorded the mercy of slavery in lieu of the death penalty³¹.

The toil of the slave is done in the light of the death he ought to have died. He can thus by no means enjoy the fruits of his labour for he no longer belongs – strictly speaking – amongst the living. This is what Patterson understands by the “social death” of the slave, perhaps fortified by his foreign ethnicity or the placing of ritual marks and signs on his body³². It is the ultimate consequence of the delegating method, illustrating the error in Aristotle’s distinction between animate and inanimate instruments. The slave cannot be an “animated possession” seeing as he is devitalised by the instrumentalisation he undergoes. He is a programmable person. Programmability and spurious action are the categories under which his toil must be understood, if we think Patterson’s claim through to its conclusions.

A slave mimics the work of a real person, who enjoys the fruit of his own labours, somewhat as a mime apes the real gestures of others. Gestures robbed of their normal aims remain trapped within a theatrical circle of pure mediacy, founded upon itself³³. The error in Aristotle's distinction of animate and inanimate instruments cannot really be held against him given that he himself has supplied the key in the form of his description of self-reflexive instrumentality as *organon pros organoon*. But it is most strange that he concludes that both in the case of the slave, an instrument to serve instruments, and in the case of democracy, a state form to decide about state forms, there is self-reflexivity, but not in the case of the weapon. Aristotle treats the weapon as a simple instrument exhibiting the same transparency and manageability as an anvil or machine.

For man, when perfected, is the best of animals, but, when separated from law and justice, he is the worst of all; since armed injustice is the more dangerous, and he is equipped at birth with arms, meant to be used by intelligence and excellence, which he may use for the worst ends. (1253a31-35)

But in truth the weapon is not a simple instrument. In its action it kicks back on its user, and so must be comprised amongst the elements counted in self-reflexivity. We must reconsider the two-way traffic between weapon and arms-bearer. Aristotle omits this step. He writes, “*ho de anthroopos hopla echoon fuetai fronèsei kai arètei*”, that man is born to bear arms with sound judgement and virtue. This is more or less the platform of the latter-day gun lobby. The classic argument of Charlton Heston, ex-chair of the NRA, sounds very Aristotelian:

There's no such thing as a good gun. There's no such thing as a bad gun. A gun in the hands of a bad man is a very dangerous thing. A gun in the hands of a good person is no danger to anyone except the bad guys...³⁴

Although Aristotle spoke of weapons vastly more primitive than the automatics of today, his knowledge of arms appears blurred in his decree that

man is “equipped at birth with arms”. He knew that men are not born equal in arms, and that technological and military inequalities make slaves of some and masters of others. The Scythian slaves in Athens were to all appearances taken prisoner as a consequence of underlying tribal disputes whereby it goes without saying that it was the group with the thinnest ranks and the worst arsenal or weakest strategy which tasted the defeat. The configuration under which a group can resort to force is the cause of slavery, rather than a natural predisposition to being ruled, as Aristotle would have it³⁵. Aristotle’s blurring has marched on through western political thought in the form of the state of nature. For Thomas Hobbes, the archaic state of nature between individuals and the modern state of nature between states are constructed symmetrically. And just as the individuals in the archaic state of nature were represented as armed against one another, the conflict between modern states is depicted along the lines of a duel: two comparable armies meet one another in sea-battles and on the field. Herfried Münkler asserts that in the 20th century, the duel paradigm lost its validity. The technological and ideological configurations of conflict between different groups has become incommensurable. Conflicts take primarily asymmetrical forms. The paradigm of war has changed from the duel into the massacre³⁶.

14) At the foundation of the naïve view of both Aristotle and the contemporary gun advocates is the bewitchment exerted by (fire-)arms. If Aristotle allowed himself to be lured by the enchantment of the sharpened sword, the gleam of bronze armour, or the keen strategist, how much more irresistible to gun advocates is the fetishised appeal of the firearm? A machine that kills at the twitch of a finger is a world apart from the brutal and messy business of killing by hand. Guns even make it possible for children to slay one another, as was shown by the death of 6-year-old Kayla Rolland in Buell Elementary School (Mt. Morris Township, Michigan). The quick, ‘soft’ death dealt by the gun, and the fog thrown up by the weapon itself about the long series of complications

that it leads to, raise questions about the notion of a “polite society” of autarchic arms-bearers. The responsible use of firearms to which recurrent appeal is made cannot be guaranteed given current arms technology, in spite of educational programmes for gun owners and their children³⁷. The compression of the handiwork of death achieved by the weapon is an ominous sign for any account of force. What assurance can we have that the abstract notion of ‘force’ is not itself a part of the fog allowing the outward spread of violent deeds and means? What does it mean to speak of taking up force oneself, or to bear arms? Only by way of a more profound critique of the New Right’s outlook may we hope to answer this question. One may ask whether a fully-armed society is still capable of the self-reflexivity essential to democracy. That is, it is only possible to bend over one’s own principles if the principles are known to the whole of the self-reflexive corps. And this whether it be the meta-instrumental knowledge of the slave within the Aristotelian definition of the *organon pros organoon*, or the perfect knowledge of gestures both inward and outward required of a mime. Thus a self-reflexive democracy these days is, strictly speaking, impossible, given the enormous complexity the galaxy of regulations has assumed, such that even a small part of that galaxy can exhaust the attentions of a juridical specialist. But, at least in principle the mass of laws is equally accessible to all members of a society. It is otherwise with perfect knowledge of the weapons of the armed autarch. If one is said to be master of one’s own power, and if this possession may take the form of the firearm fetish, does he not risk in turn to fall wholly under the power of the fetish? For just that reason all members of an armed community should learn the use of weapons from a tender age, beginning with seeing their own bodies as weapons. This apparently would hold for all future communities, however heavily or lightly-armed: that taking force into one’s own hands may more often mean being manipulated oneself. This upbringing should begin with self-reflexivity. Only one who is aware of the possibility that his own corps and the wider social body might be harmed or even destroyed, may be asked at a moment’s notice to take

responsibility for these corps. Only then are abstractions such as “bearing arms” fully understood.

15) The strange utopia of weapons training has a broader significance. It permits an expanded development of the concept of the democratic theatre of dispute. In turn, this expanded concept contains a powerful critique of the second objective of the New Right and conservative approach: the intensified delegation of force as a handmaid of politics. Schools embody self-reflexive instrumentality, in the form of teachers and students who play-act and make-believe. The language instructor speaks, but in a fake language which only serves to show how language works. The shop teacher makes things, but only to show rather than to use them. Schools are the ideal place for the unfurling of Lefort’s distinction between power and knowledge. Everyone is taught self-reflexivity, or the ability while going about one’s business to ask about its footing. School, as theatre of dispute is an antipode to the New Right’s theatre of normalcy. For there, one finds no place for the most unstable fiction of a homogenous community amidst a globalising economy which generates ever-greater discrepancies. The New Right, in Europe and worldwide, dreams of a perfect differentiation of friend from foe. A wall may no longer secure such a boundary in the old, material way, but perhaps in the future a control mechanism will serve a similar function within the organism of society, keeping friendly and hostile elements distinct. Is that not the culmination of the logic of armour: an organism which fills in its own holes and automatically separates from any hostile thought or communication? Will the citizens of a New Right future be expected to embody orthodoxy itself?

16) The challenge which needs answering in the populist discourse between authoritarian and ethnocentric cultural thinking on the one hand, and economic liberalism on the other, which has been the making of the platform of most New Right parties, would be punctured immediately in a democratic theatre of dispute. Such a theatre would serve the function

to highlight in all their starkness the unseen, new inequalities of our day, so far beyond compare with the inequalities of old, rather than veiling them. On this burlesque stage, the New Right dream of a perfect distinction between friend and foe is ridiculed. Opposite the spectacle of homogenised peace and one-dimensional seriousness of the theatre of the normal, this theatre realises a playfulness, in the form of Derridean word-play, the play-acting of the teacher and other contrivances of ever-renewed democratic disputes.

NOTES

1. The *Front National* in France; the *Vlaams Belang* (Flemish Interest, known as *Vlaams Blok* until November 2004) in Belgium; the *Fremskritspartiet* (Progress Party) in Norway; the *Dansk Folkeparti* in Denmark; the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* in Austria; the *Deutsche Volksunion* and the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* in Germany.

2. Front National: party platform at www.frontnational.com, p. 105. Vlaams Belang: platform of 12-12-2004 (www.vlaamsbelang.be), p. 36. These are comparable to the point of view of the FPÖ: “Grundsätzlich wird an der Verpflichtung jedes Staatsbürgers festgehalten, im Ernstfall eine persönliche Leistung für die Sicherheit und Unabhängigkeit Österreichs zu erbringen” (party platform at www.fpoe.at, p. 11).

3. In his 1919 lecture, “Politik als Beruf”.

4. Karl Marx, “Zur Judenfrage” (1843).

<http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/marx/judenfra/judenfra.htm>

5. Compare with Pierre BLAISE and Patrick MOREAU (eds.), *Extrême droite et national-populisme en Europe de l'Ouest*, Brussels, CRISP, 2004, pp. 97, 129-130. “In contrast to fascist paramilitary mass organizations, the organizational efforts of the New Radical Right tend to focus on the construction of modern “framework parties” that rely on a few highly visible individuals and a staff of professional managers, together with a rather limited following of party activists” (Herbert KITSCHOLT (with Anthony MCGANN), *The Radical Right in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis*, Ann Arbor (MI), University of Michigan Press, 1995, p. 32).

6. Peter SINGER, *The President of Good and Evil: Taking George W. Bush Seriously*, London, Granta, 2004, pp. 81-87. Compare with the comments made by the British Foreign Office concerning the transfer of Craig Murray, the ambassador for the UK in Uzbekistan who had criticized the Uzbek government instructing the army to torture prisoners: “[T]he Foreign Office stated its view that although Britain did not torture people to obtain information, the intelligence gained through torture was worth the risk to protect British nationals” (*The Independent* 16-10-04).

7. Darius REJALI, “The Real Shame of Abu Ghraib” (20-05-2004), *Time Online Edition*. <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,640375,00.html>.

8. Richard VON DÜLMEN, *Theater des Schreckens: Gerichtspraxis und Strafrituale in der frühen Neuzeit*, rev. ed., Munich, Beck, 1995.
9. Gregor GIERSCH, “Private Militärfirmen: Ökonomisierung der Gewalt oder Erweiterung staatlicher Ordnungsmacht?” (2003), unpublished paper, <http://evakreisky.at/seminararbeiten.php>; Herfried MÜNKLER, *Die neuen Kriege*, Reinbek, Rowohlt, 2002.
10. “Jeff Cooper’s Commentaries”, Vol. 12, No. 11. Oct. 2004.
(www.dvc.org.uk/~johnny/jeff)
11. “Jeff Cooper’s Commentaries”, Vol. 5, No. 2. Febr. 1997.
(www.dvc.org.uk/~johnny/jeff)
12. Party platform (www.fpoe.at), p. 20.
13. See Elizabeth BAUGHMAN, “Scythian Archers” (20-01-2003), *Demos: Classical Athenian Democracy*,
<http://www.stoa.org/projects/demos>, for a collection of references from ancient sources. In addition: Muzaffer DEMIR, “Athenian Slaves from the Black Sea with Specific Reference to Scythians in the Northern Parts” (paper presented at the conference on “The Black Sea Region: Past, Present and Future”, Oct. 2004, Istanbul Technical University); P.J. RHODES, *The Athenian Boule*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1972, pp. 146-147; and the entries “Polizei”, “Skythai”, and “Skythen” in Hubert CANKIK (ed.), *Der neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike*, Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996-2003.
14. Orlando PATTERSON, *Slavery and Social Death*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1982.
15. Andocides 3.5, Aeschines 2.173.
16. W. NIPPEL, “Polizei”, *Der neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike*, Victor BERS and Adriaan LANNI, “An Introduction to the Athenian Legal System” (Febr. 2002), *Athenian Law in its Democratic Context* (online discussion series, Center for Hellenic Studies, Harvard University),
http://www.chs.harvard.edu/online_disc/athenian_law/lect_berslanni.html.
17. ARISTOTLE, *The Politics*, ed. S. Everson, transl. B. Jowett (rev. by J. Barnes), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
18. “When several villages are united in a single community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing [*tēs autarkeias*], the state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life. And therefore, if the earlier forms of society are natural, so is the state, for it is the end of them, and the nature of a thing is its end. For what each thing is when fully developed, we call its nature, whether we are speaking of a man, a horse, or a family. Besides, the final cause and end of a thing is the best, and to be self-sufficing is the end and the best” (1252b27-1253a1).
19. Slaves had no rights and were unable to marry; a slave family could be torn apart at any given time; slaves could be sold or borrowed; slaves had no legal protection whatsoever against those who wanted to harm them.
20. Jacques DERRIDA, “La raison du plus fort (Y a-t-il des États voyous?)”, *Voyous*, Paris: Galilée, 2003, pp. 67-72.
21. Christopher W. BLACKWELL, “An Introduction to Classical Athenian Democracy” (Febr. 2003).
(www.chs.harvard.edu/online_disc/athenian_law/lect_blackwell_ovr.html)

22. Claude LEFORT, *L'invention démocratique: Les Limites de la domination totalitaire* (1981), rev. ed., Paris, Fayard, 1994. The empty space is treated specifically on pp. 92-93, 99.
23. Jacques DERRIDA, *Voyous*, Paris: Galilée, 2003, p. 13. For a critique see Samir HADDAD, "Derrida and Democracy at Risk", *Contretemps: An Online Journal of Philosophy* 4 (2004). (www.usyd.edu.au/contretemps/dir/contretemps4.html)
24. DERRIDA, *Voyous*, pp. 29-33. There is a clear reference to Lefort's definition of democracy: "la roue libre, la vacance ou l'indétermination sémantique qui, au centre du concept de démocratie, fait tourner son histoire" (p. 47).
25. DERRIDA, *Voyous*, p. 48.
26. DERRIDA, *Voyous*, p. 54.
27. BLACKWELL, art. cit. (§ 6), with reference to one such formula: "Whosoever, whether magistrate or private citizen, shall cause this ordinance to be frustrated, or shall alter the same, shall be disfranchised with his children and his property" (qtd. in Demosthenes 23.62).
28. DERRIDA, *Voyous*, p. 54-66.
29. Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882), § 86.
30. KITSCHOLT, *The Radical Right in Western Europe*, p. 32; BLAISE en MOREAU (eds.), *Extrême droite et national-populisme en Europe de l'Ouest*, pp. 68, 101-102, 115, 130.
31. PATTERSON, *Slavery and Social Death*, ch. 1, § 11-12.
32. PATTERSON, *Slavery and Social Death*, ch. 1, § 21, 27-28.
33. Giorgio AGAMBEN, "Notes on Gesture" (1992), *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, transl. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, pp. 58-59.
34. Interview with FOX News Channel, 15 sept. 1997. (www.nrawinningteam.com/hestquot.html)
35. "[T]here is no natural ruler among [the barbarians]: they are a community of slaves, male and female" (1252b6-7).
36. Herfried MÜNKLER, "The End of 'Classical' Warfare: Warlords, Terrorist Networks, and the Future of Violence" (14-09-2002), *Art & Thought*, 2003, no. 77, http://www.qantara.de/web-com/show_download.php/_c-496/i.html.
37. E.g. Jeff Cooper's "Four Rules of Gun Safety", and the NRA's "Eddie Eagle Gunsafe Program": "Like swimming pools, electrical outlets, matchbooks and household poison, [firearms are] treated simply as a fact of everyday life" (<http://www.nrahq.org/safety/eddie/index.asp>). The Violence Policy Center has poignantly criticized this program: *Joe Camel with Feathers: How the NRA with Gun and Tobacco Industry Dollars Uses its Eddie Eagle Program to Market Guns to Kids* (1997), <http://www.vpc.org/studies/eddiecon.htm>.