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Doing evil in the name of good
Fazer o mal em nome do bem
Hacer el mal en nombre del bien

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Abstract:
Certain unjust actions are committed by people who understand them as right, necessary, or morally obligatory. The injustice remains concealed from those who perpetrate it, even though it may be recognized by those affected or by third parties. The argument developed here explains this form of wrongdoing as a cycle comprising three stages. Influences offer an interpreted world; an understanding shaped by these influences presents the violation of another person as protection, reparation, or duty; and the action thus authorized may return as a new influence, reinforcing the understanding that made it possible. Once formed, an understanding may begin to select the sources it accepts, become attached to the agent's sense of belonging and self-image, and reinterpret contrary information as confirmation of a perceived threat. Three documented episodes put this model to the test: the attacks on asylum seeker hotels and a mosque in England following the Southport murders in July 2024; the storming of the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021; and the storming of the headquarters of Brazil's three branches of government on January 8, 2023. In each case, participants invoked a perceived good — the protection of children, the defense of the Constitution, or the salvation of the nation — to justify harming people who had done them no harm. The model is defended against four objections and supplemented by a normative criterion that does not depend on the agent's conviction: the person affected remains a participant in a shared condition, and the consideration owed to that person is not nullified by disagreement. On this basis, the final section proposes where and how the cycle can be interrupted: at the stage of influence, at the stage of understanding, and at the stage of action, with criminal law providing a response that comes afterward, remains limited, and never reproduces the exclusion to which it responds.

Keywords: evil; moral justification; dehumanization; social media; political violence; criminal law; responsibility.

Resumo:
Determinadas ações injustas são praticadas por pessoas que as compreendem como corretas, necessárias ou moralmente obrigatórias. A injustiça permanece encoberta para quem a pratica, embora possa ser reconhecida pelos atingidos ou por terceiros. O argumento aqui desenvolvido explica essa modalidade de prática do mal como um ciclo de três momentos. Influências oferecem um mundo interpretado; uma compreensão formada sob essas influências apresenta a violação de outra pessoa como proteção, reparação ou dever; a ação assim autorizada pode retornar como nova influência, que reforça a compreensão que a tornou possível. Uma compreensão formada pode passar a selecionar as fontes que admite, a prender-se ao pertencimento e à imagem de si do agente e a reinterpretar informações contrárias como confirmação da ameaça percebida. Três episódios documentados põem o modelo à prova: os ataques a hotéis de requerentes de asilo e a uma mesquita na Inglaterra após os assassinatos de Southport, em julho de 2024; a invasão do Capitólio dos Estados Unidos, em 6 de janeiro de

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2021; e a invasão das sedes dos três Poderes em Brasília, em 8 de janeiro de 2023. Em cada um deles, os participantes invocaram um bem — a proteção das crianças, a defesa da constituição, a salvação da nação — para autorizar o dano contra pessoas que nada lhes haviam feito. O modelo é defendido contra quatro objeções e completado por um critério normativo que não depende da convicção do agente: a pessoa atingida continua sendo participante de uma condição compartilhada, e a consideração que lhe é devida não é cancelada pela discordância. Sobre essa base, a parte final propõe onde e como o ciclo pode ser interrompido: no momento da influência, no momento da compreensão e no momento da ação, com uma resposta penal que chega depois, permanece limitada e jamais reproduz a exclusão a que responde.

Palavras-chave: mal; justificação moral; desumanização; redes sociais; violência política; Direito penal; responsabilidade.

Resumen:
Determinadas acciones injustas son realizadas por personas que las consideran correctas, necesarias o moralmente obligatorias. La injusticia permanece oculta para quien la comete, aunque puede ser reconocida por las personas afectadas o por terceros. El argumento aquí desarrollado explica esta modalidad de práctica del mal como un ciclo de tres momentos. Las influencias ofrecen un mundo interpretado; una comprensión formada bajo esas influencias presenta la vulneración de otra persona como protección, reparación o deber; la acción así autorizada puede retornar como una nueva influencia que refuerza la comprensión que la hizo posible. Una comprensión ya formada puede comenzar a seleccionar las fuentes que admite, a vincularse con el sentido de pertenencia y la imagen de sí del agente y a reinterpretar la información contraria como confirmación de la amenaza percibida. Tres episodios documentados ponen a prueba el modelo: los ataques contra hoteles que alojaban a solicitantes de asilo y contra una mezquita en Inglaterra después de los asesinatos de Southport, en julio de 2024; el asalto al Capitolio de Estados Unidos, el 6 de enero de 2021; y el asalto a las sedes de los tres poderes en Brasilia, el 8 de enero de 2023. En cada uno de ellos, los participantes invocaron un bien —la protección de los niños, la defensa de la Constitución, la salvación de la nación— para autorizar el daño contra personas que no les habían hecho nada. El modelo se defiende frente a cuatro objeciones y se completa con un criterio normativo que no depende de la convicción del agente: la persona afectada sigue siendo participante de una condición compartida, y la consideración que se le debe no queda anulada por el desacuerdo. Sobre esta base, la parte final propone dónde y cómo puede interrumpirse el ciclo: en el momento de la influencia, en el de la comprensión y en el de la acción, con una respuesta penal que llega después, permanece limitada y jamás reproduce la exclusión a la que responde.

Palabras clave: mal; justificación moral; deshumanización; redes sociales; violencia política; derecho penal; responsabilidad.

Note on sources and translations: References to works consulted in Portuguese correspond to the editions indicated in the references. Direct quotations of works and documents in English are translations by the author; the author's own book is quoted by the final text; expressions kept in English preserve the source text. Submissions per chapter are used for editions without a page. Citations known through another work are identified as such.

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1. The problem

Sincerity is often treated as a mitigating factor. Someone who harms another person while believing they are doing good seems less culpable than someone who harms with declared malice; the law recognizes this difference, as does ordinary moral life. Nevertheless, the twentieth century produced its greatest harms through people who were largely convinced of their own righteousness. Susan Neiman records the fact without softening it: "At every level, the Nazis produced more evil, with less malice, than civilization has ever known before" (Neiman, 2003, ch. 4). The disproportion between the damage caused and the ill-will of the person who caused it is not an anomaly of a regime. It is a recurring form of evil practice, and it reappears, on a smaller scale and with other actors, whenever a group begins to understand humiliation, exclusion or aggression of others as something due to a good.

The difficulty is not that such agents are ignorant of what they are doing. The man who sets fire to the entrance to a hotel that houses asylum seekers knows there are people inside. The woman who writes that hotels should be burned knows what fire does. The crowds that force the entrance to a parliament know they break down doors and strike police officers. What remains hidden is not the event, but its moral significance. The agent knows the act and does not acknowledge the injustice of the act, because the understanding by which he authorizes it has already classified it as protection, repair or duty. Knowing the suffering caused is not the same as acknowledging its injustice: the agent may select, following the events, an act of the other party, present it as the original provocation and conclude, in Bandura's description, that the adversaries brought the suffering upon themselves and therefore deserve to be punished (Bandura, 2016, p. 90). This is what will be called here evil concealed from the agent: an injustice that, within the understanding that authorizes it, remains concealed from the person who commits it, although it may be recognized by the person who suffers it or by third parties.

The expression is deliberately narrower than "hidden evil". The point is not that injustice is always transparent to its victims; a person can naturalise the harm that is done to him, misunderstand it or pass it off as deserved, and all three cases contain victims who were not heard before the act. The point is asymmetry: what can be seen from the position of the victim or an observer, the author has learned not to see as injustice, and it is this learning that constitutes the problem. Explaining how someone comes to see unjust harm as a moral duty requires explaining three things at the same time: how the understanding that authorizes harm is formed, how that understanding converts a response that would be inadmissible into a

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response that seems required, and why the action, once performed, can strengthen the conditions that made it acceptable. A purely psychological explanation of the first point, a purely sociological explanation of the second or a purely historical explanation of the third leaves the connection between them to be explained. And a description that leaves the most important question unanswered: where can the process be stopped, and by what right, if the agent does not accept the interruption?

The thesis defended here can be stated in a compact way. Evil gains strength when the understanding that guides the agent presents an unjust action as the accomplishment of a good. Influences participate in the formation of this understanding; understanding gives the action its meaning and its apparent legitimacy; the action can produce new influences that reinforce the process. To stop the process requires understanding its passages, preserving the possibility of review and maintaining limits of justice that do not depend on the approval of the agent or his group.

Six propositions support the argument, and are presented together so that the structure is visible before any of them is defended.

1. Conviction that one is acting correctly is not enough to make an action just.
2. The agent acts on the basis of an understanding of the situation, the people involved, and the responses they consider admissible.
3. Influences participate in forming this understanding without determining it entirely.
4. An understanding can present the violation of someone's dignity as protection, reparation, or duty.
5. The action thus legitimized can reinforce the conditions that made it acceptable.
6. There are reasons to combine, when interrupting the process, the revision of this understanding with limits on the practice of injustice that do not depend on the agent's assent, because preventing an action does not, by itself, transform the understanding that authorized it.

The first sentence establishes the possibility of concealed evil from the agent. The following four explain its development as a cycle. The latter opens the answer to the problem of interruption and carries the practical contribution of the argument.

The method is the philosophical reconstruction of action, based on bibliography and examined by documented cases and objections. Three episodes serve as material: the attacks that followed the Southport murders in England in the summer of 2024; the US Capitol raid on 6 January 2021; and the Three Powers Square raid in Brasilia on 8 January 2023. In each of

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them, the participants' justifications are documented in official, judicial or academic sources, in a way that allows them to ask all three the same questions. The cases test the model; they do not demonstrate a psychological law, and nothing here depends on the claim that every participant in these events believed in the good of what they were doing. Some believed; some manipulated; many combined conviction, opportunism and belonging. The model explains a mode of action, not the entirety of any event.

Attributing an understanding to an agent is an inference from partly strategic evidence, and inference needs a stated pattern. The pattern used here is the contextualized triangulation of four types of material, where they exist: statements before the act, contemporary messages to it, conduct during it, and explanations offered afterwards. Not every case provides the four, and an assignment supported on two or three is recorded with the weight they support. The difference between them is not treated as evidence of insincerity; it may reflect memory, ambivalence, change or opportunism, and which of them reflects is, in turn, a matter of evidence. Where the sources below are judicial, the court's findings are recorded as the court's, and the standard it applied is stated when the decision states it.

Three limits of the argument deserve recording from the beginning. Claims on the frequency of the phenomenon, on the causal weight of any single influence or on the effectiveness of any proposed intervention require empirical support of their own, which is cited where it exists and not presumed where it does not exist. The regulatory criterion that allows an action to be called unfair against the agent's conviction is taken from a position defended elsewhere (Dietrich, 2026) and stated here with the precision that the argument needs, without being fully redirected. And the mode studied is defined by the presence of a justifiable moral understanding, not by the place that violence occupies in it. The Italian Social Republic volunteer Hobsbawm quotes - "Killing is important. This is the frontier to be crossed". (Hobsbawm, 1995, ch. 4, epígrafe) - falls within the modality understood to kill as a moral achievement, which the letter leaves open, and outside it only where no understanding of the act as well is at stake, as in the harm done for gain or pleasure without any pretence of righteousness. In the latter case, there is nothing hidden from the agent that the argument needs to explain.

Three terms apply and need to be kept separate. Dano denotes the effect on the person. Injustice means damage that violates the consideration due to a person as a participant in a shared condition, according to the criterion of Section 2. Evil, in the title and in several of the sources, denotes the grave injustice committed against people, and is used here only in this

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narrow sense, without compromise with any metaphysics of evil. The distinction between misfortune and injustice, and the assertion that the voice of the victim of an injustice should be included in his identification are by Judith Shklar (1990), and the thesis that injustice can be recognized from the victim's position while remaining hidden from the agent extends his description of the asymmetry between the two positions.

2. Conviction and justice

If the agent considers the action to be correct, by what right can it be called unfair? The question needs to be answered before any attempt at explanation, because explaining how people endorse injustice presupposes that their approval does not solve the issue.

2.1 The insufficiency of sincerity

The first proposition states that the conviction of acting correctly is not enough to make an action fair. Your defense does not require a complete theory of justice. It just requires that the understanding from which one acts is the kind of thing that can be examined and found to be wrong. No one doubts this as to factual understandings: a person can sincerely believe that a stranger has committed a crime and be wrong. What is less often admitted is that the same is true of the moral content of an understanding. A person can sincerely believe that a category of people deserves to be expelled, and be wrong about what is due them. If sincerity solved the issue, the second kind of error would be impossible, and any persecution undertaken in good faith would be just by definition.

Neiman's reconstruction of the Eichmann problem makes the point. Prosecution and defense at the Jerusalem trial were based on the assumption that the defendant's harmless intentions, if proven, would diminish his liability; Arendt's contribution was to deny the assumption. "His main argument is that Eichmann's harmless intentions did not diminish his responsibility" (Neiman, 2003, ch. 4). Neiman draws the lesson that the belief that bad actions require bad intentions was itself a resource of totalitarian regimes: "Mass propaganda efforts were aimed at convincing people that the criminal actions they engaged in were guided by acceptable, even noble motives" (Neiman, 2003, ch. 4). Guilt, she adds, "is so unreliable that it can often serve as a barometer of innocence" (Neiman, 2003, ch. 4). A clear conscience is not, therefore, proof of clean conduct. Arendt's description of the terror tribunal completes the thought: there "all concerned are subjectively innocent: the murdered because they did nothing

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against the regime, and the murderers because they did not actually murder but executed a death sentence pronounced by a higher court" (Arendt, 2012, ch. 13). Subjective innocence is exactly the condition the thesis describes, and it is compatible with the most serious objective guilt.

Jeffrey Burton Russell, writing from the history of religions, comes to the same conclusion by another route. The essence of evil is, to him, "the abuse of a sentient being, a being who can feel pain" (Russell, 1977, p. 17), and it is first perceived by those who suffer it. This makes it possible to judge the act and the author separately: "A torturer may act out of fear or erroneous rationalization; but torture remains an absolute and objective evil" (Russell, 1977, p. 24). He recalls Thomas Aquinas' observation that "we almost never really choose nothing - generally we do evil by seeking good by the wrong way" (Russell, 1977, p. 24, n. 6), and concludes by admitting that "rationalizations are infinite. Perhaps even the Devil has convinced himself that he is doing the right thing" (Russell, 1977, p. 35).

The argumentative passage is short. The agent understands an action as fair. That understanding can be examined and it can be wrong. Therefore, the honesty of the agent does not end the moral evaluation of the action.

The second premise carries a commitment that should be made rather than presumed: that moral understanding is the kind of thing that can be wrong. The strongest rival denies that. In a consequent version of relativism, the moral understanding of the agent is constituted by the culture and the group in which he acts, and there is no point of view outside that culture from which it could be called an error; the critic who so calls it merely relates the patterns of another group. The replica does not require refuting relativism in general. It merely requires the observation, which Michele Moody-Adams (1994) develops against the relativist excuse, that the cultures in which the agents of the three cases acted contained the means to acknowledge error - the law, the courts, police statements, the counter-demonstrators, the commanders who refused - and that, where an agent refused those means, his ignorance of what he was doing was, in her word, affected: a condition maintained by not looking, not a condition imposed by the absence of anything to see. Whether and to what extent this description applies to a particular participant is a question for section 6; what the answer needs is only that the resources exist in the world of the agents themselves, so that the relativist cannot say that understanding was the only thing that culture made possible. That is enough for the argument; it leaves open the deepest meta-ethical question and does not depend on closing it.

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What the passage does not yet offer is the criterion by which understanding is examined. Describing that someone was affected does not in itself show that there was injustice; it must show what consideration was due to that person and how the action violated it.

2.2 The criterion: the other as a participant

The criterion adopted here comes from a philosophy of normativeness long developed elsewhere (Dietrich, 2026), and only its supporting elements are stated. No one starts by producing what they live on. Language, law, trust, institutions, physical conditions of a place: all this precedes the individual who depends on them, and dependence on what has not occurred is not a defect of life, but its form (Dietrich, 2026, chs. 1, 4). Participating is to exist by receiving what is not produced by itself, and whoever only receives - the child, the newcomer, the asylum seeker - participates fully; "Reception does not constitute a deficiency of participation. It represents one of its own ways of achieving it" (Dietrich, 2026, ch. 8).

Hence the decisive point for the first proposition. When an agent reorganizes something that others depend on, those others are already within the action, not by the agent's intention, but by the position that the thing occupies in their participation: "The direction is of the action, not of the intention; it is in the thing as a condition of the participation of others, and not in the representation that the agent makes of them" (Dietrich, 2026, ch. 11). "It may be that he has never thought of anyone. . . . None of this changes the phenomenon" (Dietrich, 2026, ch. 11). 'The position of the participants does not expect to be admitted by the subject to exist as an objective position'; 'The field precedes the point of view' (Dietrich, 2026, ch. 15). So,

> "Social approval can accompany what it destroys, just as disapproval can fall on what it preserves. This possibility of error does not constitute an obstacle to the investigation. On the contrary, it reveals that there is an objective phenomenon here whose presence does not depend on our immediate judgment" (Dietrich, 2026, ch. 9)

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An objection must be addressed before the criterion is removed, because it threatens to make it circular. In each case, the agent precisely denies that the target person participates in 'our' condition; if participation were an assignment that the group grants or refuses, the criterion would not decide anything, since the exclusion would have already resolved who counts. The answer is that participation is a position, not an assignment. The inhabitant of the Rotherham hotel depended on the same police, the same streets, the same fire brigade, the same law and the same public peace as the men gathered outside; his participation was receptive, and

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reception is a mode of participation, not a lesser degree of it. The legislators and policemen of the Capitol, the judges and authorities of Brasilia, lived by the same constitutional order that the crowds invoked for protection. The agent's denial is therefore not a competing attribution; it is a false description of a position that exists whether he describes it or not. The police, the streets and the shared law of Rotherham's example are an illustration of the relationship, not its foundation. The relationship exists wherever one person's action reorganizes conditions in which another lives, and these conditions include those that no local institution confers: the physical world, the language and the confidence that make possible any common life, the condition of being alive that can be hurt. A distant stranger, or a person subject to another institutional order, is not out of the relationship whenever an action achieves what she lives by; the hotel's membership in the same city has made the relationship easier to see, not more real.

Two demonstrations must now be kept separate, because confusing them would make the criterion circular. The first is descriptive: show who is involved in an action by the objective position just described. The second is normative: to justify what consideration is due to the parties involved. The participation relationship is the first and not the second; nothing in the fact that others live off what I reorganise implies, by itself, that I must answer to them. The author's book is explicit in that its normative reasoning is not derived from the description, but assumed, and defended as an assumption: "By reorganizing what others participate in, the agent can no longer treat this reorganization as his sole subject. The action remains directed to those whose position has been modified by it and therefore becomes accountable to them as to what has been reorganized"; and, on this: "It has not been demonstrated. It was assumed. But assuming here does not mean arbitrating" (Dietrich, 2026, ch. 13). The present argument adopts the premise with the same status. It is a normative premise, explicitly supported, and its defence is that shared dependence offers reasons to demand consideration for those affected without making this requirement dependent on the approval of those who act: those who claim the right to treat as their own the conditions that others also live in claim a position that their own dependence on these conditions is false. The defence does not exclude all alternatives; an interlocutor may recognise the shared dependence and propose another normative explanation of what it entails. It merely asserts that the premise is that at this stage it best understands the problem, which is the status that the author's book confers on it.

Separating the two demonstrations, the criterion can be stated and its application to cases must be shown, not presumed. An action is unfair when it treats a person who participates in a shared condition as if he were outside of it - as not participating, as a thing, as threatening to

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remove - and thereby destroys or degrades what that person depends on, while the agent continues to live under the same conditions that he denies the other. The strongest form of the criterion is the floor below which a participation ceases to be what it is: "You don't respond by destroying the very thing about which the response is due" (Dietrich, 2026, ch. 18). The floor "does not compare goods; it preserves the very possibility of comparing them" (Dietrich, 2026, ch. 18). The existence of the relationship does not yet show that an act violates the consideration; this requires an assessment of the act. Starting a fire at the emergency exit of a building where about two hundred people are housed in their rooms removes the condition that they continue to live, which is the floor in its most literal form, and it does it against people who had nothing reorganized from what was the agents. Political cases call for a different demonstration, and a weaker one is enough. Striking a police officer or breaking down the doors of a parliament does not necessarily, in every instance, deprive the person struck of their status as a person; a grave violation can be committed against someone who continues to be recognized as such. What makes these acts unfair by criterion is shown by three traits combined: the aggression was not provoked by anything its targets had done; its purpose was to prevent an act - certification, possession - which was the ordinary operation of the constitutional order in which the agents themselves lived; and the justifications offered to it placed the targets, as a class, outside the order they actually held - "enemies of the people", agents of a "dictatorship", a "stolen" procedure. Taken together, the three traits show the agents having a condition that the targets also live - the ordinary operation of the constitutional order - as if it were their own to suspend it, and refusing to answer to those whose position they changed; this is precisely the relationship that the normative premise denies to anyone, and it does not require that the person struck be deprived of his or her personal status. Injustice is demonstrated by unjustified aggression, by its purpose and its justification, without the need to prove, for each blow, the complete denial of the person's condition. Where this denial occurs - the person is thrown out of a shelter by fire, beaten for belonging to a category, deprived of human status - the criterion is satisfied in its strongest form: the person is not weighed against the agent's good; the possibility of regret has been suppressed.

Four independent vocabularies converge for this criterion and will be used alongside it. Helen Fein (1979), in studying national responses to the genocide of the Jews, named the "universe of obligation" - the circle of those to whom obligations are due and whose injuries require reparation (Fein, 1979, p. 4) - and showed that genocide became possible where the State defined its victims outside it. Zygmunt Bauman, reprising the term, describes this universe

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as "the outer limits of the social territory within which some moral question with some meaning can be put", so that "To make humanity invisible to victims it is only necessary to remove them from the universe of obligation" (Bauman, 1998, ch. 1, a partir de Fein, 1979). Susan Opotow (1990) gives the same phenomenon its name in social psychology, moral exclusion: placing people outside the "scope of justice", so that harming them seems appropriate, acceptable or fair. Eugenio Raúl Zaffaroni finds the essence of treating the enemy in the fact that "right denies him his personal status. It is only considered as a dangerous or harmful entity" (Zaffaroni, 2011, p. 18), and adds to the precision that matters: "It is not the amount of rights that someone is deprived of that person that nullifies his or her personal status, but the very reason on which that deprivation of rights is based" (Zaffaroni, 2011, p. 18). Philip Zimbardo's definition of dehumanization is the psychological counterpart: it "occurs whenever some human beings consider other human beings excluded from the moral order of being a human person" (Zimbardo, 2007, p. 307); Nick Haslam's review (2006) distinguishes its two forms, the denial of uniquely human attributes, which makes the other an animal, and the denial of human nature, which makes the other an object, and both appear in the cases. Behind all of them is Levinas' statement that responsibility for the other precedes any knowledge of the other's qualities and is not conditioned on reciprocity (Levinas, 1969); the criterion here adopted shares priority and differs fundamentally, as it locates the relationship not only on the face but on the shared condition that both parties live, without which, as the author's book against Levinas notes, "no relationship remains" (Dietrich, 2026, ch. 11, n. 59). The criterion is therefore not an idiosyncratic pattern. He names what these authors describe from history, law and experiment: the removal of a person from the circle within which consideration is due.

A consequence must be fixed now, because it governs the treatment of cases. The criterion applies to the group with which the author identifies himself as much as to any other. It is not satisfied with disagreements, restrictive policies or self-defense. Deportation, border control, boycotts or vigorous political opposition are not just name persecution. A hostile reader will object that the criterion, taken seriously, prohibits any removal of a person from a shared condition and thus condemns any immigration policy; the objection would be proceeding if the criterion depended on results. It depends on reasons and methods, and Zaffaroni's precision, cited above, provides the condition of application: what invalidates the status of person is not the amount of rights withdrawn, but the reason for withdrawal. A removal decided by procedure, with guarantees, aimed at a claim (to remain) and not a status (personal status), treats the removal as a participant whose claim has been denied. An attack on a hotel treats its

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residents as dangerous things. The two are distinguished by their fundamentals, their means, their guarantees, their assignments of responsibility and their effects on people, and not by someone ending up elsewhere. What the judgment condemns is the passage from "this person's claim must be denied" to "this person is not someone to whom something is due".

3. The cycle: influence, understanding, action

The second to fifth propositions describe a process. It is presented as a cycle because its last moment feeds the first, but it is not a mechanism: at each pass, people refuse, review, or stop. The description of each moment therefore includes the description of its limit.

3.1 Influence offers an interpreted world

Influences do more than convey information. They offer articulated answers to a set of questions that every agent needs to somehow answer: What's going on? Who's in charge? Who threatens our way of life? What can or should we do? Family, religious community, personal experience, political discourse and digital environments participate in this process, and the same influence is received differently depending on each person's trajectory and ties. Two types of influence need to be separated from the beginning, because the responsibility they carry differs: the influence that someone wants - the leader who summons, the account that makes a name, the consultant who designs a campaign - and the influence that nobody wants, like the ordering of an algorithm or the aggregate effect of a thousand re-sharing, an authorless order (Dietrich, 2026, ch. 22). Both form understanding; only the former has an agent who can be asked to respond to the formed understanding. Section 6 returns to the difference. What the two have in common is the function that Robert Entman (1993) assigns to the framework: to select certain aspects of a situation and make them prominent in order to promote a definition of the problem, a causal diagnosis, a moral assessment and a remedy. A framework is an understanding offered for adoption, and the four elements Entman lists are the four questions above. No one interprets from an empty point; the historicity of understanding, in Gadamer's sense, means that all interpretation begins within a heritage of previous understanding (Gadamer, 2004). That inheritance is not a mistake to be purged. It is the condition of any understanding, and the question is what inheritance is offered and how it closes or opens to correction.

What the most powerful influences offer is consistency. Arendt's analysis of totalitarian propaganda is the classic formulation: "What convinces the masses is not the facts, even if they

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are invented facts, but only the coherence with the system of which those facts are part" (Arendt, 2012, ch. 11). Before taking power, movements "invocate this false world of coherence, which is more suited to the needs of the human mind than reality itself" (Arendt, 2012, ch. 11), and people choose it, Arendt insists, "not because they are stupid or wicked, but because, in general disaster, this escape allows them to maintain a minimum of self-respect" (Arendt, 2012, ch. 11). Adorno's studies describe the same offer at the individual level: "Blaming the Jews for all existing evils is like penetrating into the darkness of reality like a holocaust, allowing for quick and comprehensive guidance" (Adorno et al., 2019, p. 266); stereotypes "provide the individual with a kind of knowledge, or substitutes for knowledge, that make it possible for him to take a position that is expected of him [...] even if he realizes, deep down, the inadequacy of his opinions" (Adorno et al., 2019, p. 356). The formula attracts because it reduces "the complicated to the elementary" (Adorno et al., 2019, p. 267), and is stable because, kept "pure" from contact with experience, it is not disturbed by what would correct it (Adorno et al., 2019, p. 267).

Building an enemy is the privileged form of this coherence. Its mechanics have been described in several directions: as the scapegoat, the arbitrary victim against whom a community's unanimous violence restores an order it feels threatened (Girard, 1986); as the popular demon of a moral panic, in which a category of people is amplified into a danger disproportionate to what it has done (Cohen, 2002); and as the exogroupe of the theory of social identity, whose depreciation supports the positive self-definition of the endogroupe (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Zaffaroni's genealogy of hostiles shows that "These are declared enemies, not because they declare or manifest their animosity, but because power declares them as such" (Zaffaroni, 2011, p. 23), and that "Without a basis of fear corresponding to a prejudice, it is impossible to build an enemy" (Zaffaroni, 2011, p. 34, n. 23). Fraenkel, writing from within the Third Reich, records the regime's own frankness about the enemy's function: "it does not matter whether that enemy is real or imaginary. It doesn't really matter who the enemy is. The simple fact that an enemy exists is the important point" (Fraenkel, 2017, p. 198). Paxton includes among fascism's "mobilizing passions" "the belief that the group itself is a victim, a feeling that serves as justification for any action, without legal or moral limits, against its enemies, both external and internal", and notes that these passions are "generally given as certain and not always discussed explicitly as intellectual propositions" (Paxton, 2007, p. 78). They constitute, in their own words, the "emotional lava" under the doctrine.

Contemporary digital environments didn't invent this offer, but they changed its scale, speed, and reward structure. The relevant empirical findings, reported in detail by Max Fisher,

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are specific. Each moral-emotional term in a post increased its diffusion by about twenty percent, and propagation was stronger within the author's own ideological network than between networks (Brady et al., 2017); posts expressing animosity toward political outgroups obtained systematically greater engagement (Rathje et al., 2021); where right-wing audiences' use of Facebook in German municipalities was one standard deviation above the mean, the probability of an attack on refugees was about ten percent higher; the authors also present an illustrative estimate of approximately one-tenth fewer incidents in the absence of that transmission, conditional on the hypothesis that it increases the total number of incidents rather than merely changing their timing, a distinction that the study's design does not fully resolve (Müller & Schwarz, 2021, pp. 2147, 2164). Fisher's synthesis on the mechanism deserves citation because it names all three moments of the cycle at once:

> "When you see a post expressing moral outrage, 250,000 years of evolution come into play. You are compelled to participate. It makes you forget your inner sense of morality and follow that of the group. And it makes him feel that causing harm to the object of indignation is a necessary thing - even a pleasure" (Fisher, 2023, ch. 4)

. Giuliano da Empoli describes the deliberate engineering of this environment by political operators who understood "that anger was a colossal source of energy, and that it was possible to exploit it to achieve any goal, from the moment the codes were deciphered and the technology mastered" (Da Empoli, 2019, ch. 3). "The conspirator", he observes, "always proposes a flattering message. He understands the angry, he knows his anger and he justifies it: OK, it is not your fault, it is the others' fault, but you can still correct yourself and become a soldier in the battle for true justice" (Da Empoli, 2019, ch. 3). The phrase describes, in the language of a political consultant, exactly the conversion that the thesis studies: anger receives a target, the target receives a blame, and the agent receives a moral role.

Two features of the contemporary environment deserve separate mention because they focus on the transition from understanding to action. The deliberation between like-minded people shifts opinions to the extreme, a regularity that Cass Sunstein (2009) calls group polarization and which the recommendation architecture reproduces on a scale. And attitudes sustained by moral conviction are lived as objective, universal, and authoritative of themselves; they license action and reduce deference to authority and procedure (Skitka, 2010) and, because moral judgment is intuitive before it is reasoned, they unite the group and blind it to the other side (Haidt, 2012). An understanding that presents harm as protection is typically sustained with moral conviction, which helps explain why, when such understandings come to action,

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they come to action with little regard for the procedure or authority; it does not explain which of them come to action, questions which section 3.4 repeats.

Influence, however, does not determine. It is the restriction of the third proposition, and it is supported by the very research that establishes the influence. Milgram's variations showed "the extreme plasticity of human nature: almost everyone could be totally obedient, or almost everyone could resist the pressures of authority. It all depended on the situation variables they were experiencing" (Zimbardo, 2007, p. 272), which means that the presence of a dissenting partner, a reminder of responsibility or the proximity of the victim reversed the outcome. Neiman extracts the consequence for accountability: "Of all those who could have become criminals, only a few actually participated in the Final Solution. Of all those who could have become heroes, the least of them actually defied the established powers. Guilt and innocence depend on these very simple truths" (Neiman, 2003, ch. 4). Fisher's Sinhalese interlocutor put the relationship between influence and action in a phrase: "The microbes are ours, but Facebook is the wind" (Fisher, 2023, ch. 7). The wind doesn't create microbes, and it doesn't blow them all in the same direction.

3.2 Understanding turns a prohibited response into a required response

The fourth proposition is the core of the thesis, and it needs an analytical instrument. Within the understanding from which an agent acts, three contents can be distinguished, each answering a different question and each subject to a characteristic deviation.

Understanding the facts answers the question of what happened and who participated. Its characteristic deviation is the assignment of unfounded collective responsibility: a crime committed by a person becomes a crime of the category to which it is assigned, and the category becomes liable for it. Arendt described the terminal form of this deviation in the "objective enemy", which "is defined by government policy and not by demonstrating a desire to overthrow the system" and is "a 'trend carrier', like the carrier of a disease" (Arendt, 2012, ch. 12). Adorno's studies found that the projective items of the F scale rest on the same movement — "If an individual insists that someone has hostile designs on him and we can find no evidence that this is true, we have good reason to suspect that our subject has aggressive intentions and is seeking to justify them through projections" (Adorno et al., 2019, p. 157) — and that "The disproportion between the relative social weakness of the object and its supposed sinister

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omnipotence is, in itself, evidence that the projective mechanism is at work" (Adorno et al., 2019, p. 255).

Moral understanding answers the question of what is due to the people involved. Its characteristic deviation is the restriction of moral consideration to members of the group itself. It is the deviation that Bauman calls withdrawal from the universe of obligation, that Zaffaroni calls denial of the human condition, and that Zimbardo calls dehumanization. It is also the deviation that a legal theory can rationalize. The 'criminal law of the enemy' of Günther Jakobs proposes that 'Anyone who does not provide sufficient cognitive security of a personal behaviour not only cannot expect to be treated as a person yet, but the State should not treat him as a person, since otherwise it would violate the right to the security of other people' (Jakobs & Cancio Meliá, 2007, p. 42). The phrase is instructive precisely because it is offered in good faith as protection. The duty of protecting others is invoked to withdraw a person's status, and withdrawal is presented not as permitted but as required. Zaffaroni's replica maintains the line that the thesis needs: the concept of enemy 'introduces the dynamics of war smuggled into the rule of law as an exception to its rule or principle, knowing or not knowing (intention belongs to the ethical field) that this necessarily leads to the absolute state' (Zaffaroni, 2011, p. 25). Good faith is granted, and the effect remains unchanged by it. Cancio Meliá's observation that 'the quality of a person is an attribution' and that 'it is not possible to admit apostasy from the status of a citizen' (Jakobs & Cancio Meliá, 2007, p. 79) sets out, in the vocabulary of criminal theory, the second half of the criterion defended above: the respect due to a participant is not lost by his behaviour, let alone by the judgment of the group whose behaviour makes him dangerous.

Understanding the answer answers the question of what we are authorized to do. Its characteristic deviation is the presentation of humiliation, persecution or violence as protection. Criminology described the operations by which this deviation takes place before social psychology did. Gresham Sykes and David Matza (1957) observed that offenders do not reject the norms they violate; they neutralize them by five techniques - denial of responsibility, denial of harm, denial of the victim, conviction of convictors and appeal to higher allegiance - that allow the act to continue as long as the norm remains professed. The last three are the operations of the cases ahead: the victim becomes someone who deserves it, the police and the courts become the real offenders, and loyalty to children, to the country or to the nation surpasses prohibition. Albert Bandura's account of moral disengagement broadens and systematizes these techniques. Eight mechanisms operate at four loci of moral self-regulation: at the locus of

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behavior, "people sanctify harmful means by investing them with worthy social and moral purposes"; at the locus of agency, they "avoid personal accountability for harmful conduct by shifting responsibility to others and diffusing it widely"; at the locus of effects, they "disregard, minimize, distort, or even dispute the harmful effects of their actions"; and at the locus of the victim, they "exclude those whom they mistreat from their category of humanity" (Bandura, 2016, pp. 2–3). Two traits of Bandura's account are important to the thesis. "Moral disengagement does not change moral standards"; it bypasses them (Bandura, 2016, p. 3), and that is why the agent can continue to profess the values that his act violates. And "people do not usually practice harmful conduct until they have justified for themselves the morality of their actions. . . . Just and dignified ends are used to justify harmful means. The moral imperative allows people to preserve their sense of self-worth even while inflicting harm on others" (Bandura, 2016, p. 49): justification precedes the act, which is where the thesis places understanding. The four places in Bandura and the three contents here distinguished do not coincide, but they correspond: the places of agency and effects, to the understanding of facts (who did what, with what effects); the place of the victim, to the moral understanding; and the place of behavior, to the understanding of response. The last lesson Zimbardo draws from Milgram's paradigm is that which most directly concerns political violence: "Offering an ideology, or a big lie, to justify the use of any means in order to achieve the seemingly desirable and essential goal" (Zimbardo, 2007, p. 274). Fraenkel's testimony on the 1930s shows the deviation installed in the self-description of the State itself. The political struggle, wrote one Nazi minister, "must be conducted in such a way that its followers think of it as a moral and legal crusade" (Fraenkel, 2017, p. 41), and a Gestapo legal adviser could conclude that combating dangerous movements "implies the power to use all necessary means, provided they do not conflict with the law. Such conflicts with the law, however, are no longer possible" (Fraenkel, 2017, p. 25). Paxton's final definition of fascism condenses the three deviations in one sentence: an obsessive concern "with the decay and humiliation of the community seen as a victim", compensatory cults for unity and purity, and the pursuit of goals "through redemptive violence and without being subjected to ethical or legal restrictions of any kind" (Paxton, 2007, pp. 358–359).

Distinguishing the three contents explains something a simpler model cannot: why correcting information is often insufficient. A person may come to accept that a particular individual did not cause harm and continue to consider exclusion from his group desirable because the deviation is in moral understanding, not in fact. Conversely, a person can have a

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limited moral understanding and yet reject violence because the deviation in understanding the answer has not occurred. The three contents are offered as analytical distinctions whose empirical separation is research, not as a demonstrated structure of the mind. The cases suggest, without proof, that they split up. Hundreds of thousands of people have seen, and many have believed, the false attribution of the Southport murders and have not acted; inaction shows that exposure to false information, and eventual acceptance of it, is not enough to explain the practice of violence; it does not allow, in isolation, to establish whether those who did not act considered violence admissible or not, as fear, distance and lack of opportunity would also explain their inaction. What it marks is the difference between authorizing an answer in your own understanding and executing it. And the Connolly case files contain a defendant who, in police questioning, denied any restriction on his moral consideration ('about the incident [...] not about race') while his words authorized a violent response (Court of Appeal, 2025, §§12, 56); the denial may have been strategic, and the pre-trial report assessed his actions in another way (§64) so that the inquiryple only shows that the two allegations can be assessed separately, not that the two contents were separate in the agent's experience. The distinction serves to make these questions formulable. It is not claimed that the three contents are exhaustive; it is claimed that they are sufficiently distinct that an intervention aimed at one of them should not be presumed capable of reaching the others.

An additional distinction, due to Klaus Günther, refines the analysis of the third content. The justification of a standard is one thing; its application to one situation is another (Günther, 1993). Almost everyone accepts the rule "protect children from those who threaten them". Acceptance of it does not establish that a person is such a threat, nor does it establish that the response chosen is appropriate to the situation. The attribution of the threat and the consideration of the circumstances require own arguments, and it is precisely in this gap that deviations from the first and third contents occur. Participants in the cases examined below rarely invoked a standard that their critics would reject. They invoked standards that their critics share - protecting children, defending the constitution, saving the nation - and applied them to people and situations where enforcement was unwarranted.

3.3 How understanding sustains itself

The three contents describe what an understanding contains. They do not yet explain why, once formed, it resists so many times what could correct it. The cases show resistance in

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action: a police statement that the suspect was not what the rumor said, the correction of a secretary of state, the repeated decisions of an electoral court - each publicly available, each refused. Four sets of research explain resistance and, together, add to the cycle a trait missing from its first formulation: understanding, once formed, organizes the selection of influences it will receive next.

Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance provides the first element. Whoever supports an understanding and finds something that contradicts it is under pressure to reduce discomfort, and the reduction may take the form of changing the understanding or protecting it; which of the two depends on the resistance of what would have to change. Protection begins even before the opposite information is received:

> "in the face of a potential source of information, a person usually does not know the exact nature of the knowledge he would acquire from exposure to that source. It then needs to react in terms of expectations about it. ... If the expectation is that the knowledge acquired from that source would increase dissonance, it will avoid it" (Festinger, 1957, p. 128)

. Where exposure cannot be avoided, one can expect "misinterpretation or misperception of the material, or any other technique or maneuver to help abolish the newly introduced dissonance" (Festinger, 1957, p. 134). The group does dual work: it is "at the same time an important source of cognitive dissonance for the individual and an important vehicle for eliminating and reducing it" (Festinger, 1957, p. 177), and one of its ways is to make the dissenter "uncomparable to himself", attributing different motives to him, or rejecting and disparaging him (Festinger, 1957, p. 182) - the movement by which the police chief, the journalist, and the counterprotester become traitors instead of witnesses. Festinger also records the condition under which the opposite occurs: the person close to the limit of what he can tolerate "can actively seek information that increases dissonance, and be exposed to it", to abandon the position at once (Festinger, 1957, p. 129). Contradiction does not necessarily reinforce it. What theory explains is why, below this limit, it is deflected; the question that the argument needs to keep open is under what conditions a contradiction opens up understanding and under what conditions it triggers its defense.

Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson provide the second element: understanding is protected because it is tied to the agent's image of himself. Self-justification differs from lying to others because the agent "is lying to himself. That is why self-justification is more powerful and more dangerous than explicit lying" (Tavris & Aronson, 2007, p. 4). His image of the pyramid explains why people exposed to the same influences diverge: two people who start "a millimeter apart" at the top, when each has finished justifying a series of small decisions, "have slipped to

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the bottom and are now on opposite corners of it", and "have internalized their beliefs and are convinced that they have always thought that way" (Tavris & Aronson, 2007, p. 33). The intermediate choices and their justification, and not just the initial exposure, produce the different destinations. And what review requires of the agent is identity: the justifications serve to reduce the dissonance between "I am a good person" and the damage done or the hostility felt (Tavris & Aronson, 2007, p. 65), so that admitting "I did something wrong" is lived as a threat to the first sentence. This is one of the reasons why information alone is often not enough: revision can be viewed as a threat to self-image and belonging, which makes changing a personal belief more demanding.

Jonathan Haidt provides the third element, which concerns the status of reasons. Moral judgment typically comes first, as intuition, and reasoning follows it "to construct post hoc justifications"; intuitions "are a kind of cognition. They are simply not a kind of reasoning" (Haidt, 2012, ch. 2). The reasoner functions as the "press secretary" of judgment (Haidt, 2012, ch. 4), and moral reasoning is "part of our lifelong struggle to win friends and influence people" (Haidt, 2012, ch. 2). Where that applies, responding to every argument the agent offers does not reach the process that supports his position, because the arguments were not what produced it. Haidt's account, however, is not a counsel of despair: "the reasons given by other people sometimes change our intuitions and judgments", and "friends can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves: they can challenge us" (Haidt, 2012, ch. 2); and groups organized so that "some individuals can use their reasoning power to refute others' claims", while all "feel some common bond or shared destiny", can produce good reasoning "as an emergent property of the social system" (Haidt, 2012, ch. 4). Two consequences follow for the thesis. Understanding, in the sense used here, must continue to encompass tacit, affective and socially sustained interpretations; reduced to a consciously reasoned conclusion before each act, it would lose most of the phenomenon. And the question of revision becomes the question of how a reason becomes audible -- of who, in what relationship, under what shared bond -- and not just whether it is true.

Bandura provides the fourth element, which concerns graduality and group. Change is rarely sudden: "initially, individuals engage in slightly harmful acts that they can tolerate with some degree of guilt. After their self-reproach has decreased through repetitions, the level of cruelty increases", and "due to the gradualness of transformation, individuals may not even recognize the changes their moral self has gone through" (Bandura, 2016, pp. 97–98). Radicalisation, in his report, often "begins with pro-social efforts to change certain social

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policies, considered harmful or contrary to the common good" (Bandura, 2016, pp. 99–100). And at the collective level, the justifications are not produced by each member individually: in a network of participants, "members do not need to invent their own individual exemptions. [...] They provide each other with exemptions", so that collective disengagement is "an emerging property of the group level" (Bandura, 2016, p. 100).

These four elements do not add a step to the cycle. They describe what happens within the time of the understanding after it has been formed, and allow for a distinction that the proposals in Section 7 will require: between the information that exists, the information that reaches the agent, the information that the agent treats as reliable and the information that can change his judgment. It is in the intervals between them that the resistance slows down, and they do not close producing more than the first. The resulting refinement of the thesis is offered as the very formulation of the argument, not as a law established by the research that it applies: an understanding can be closed when the influences that formed it are protected by the selection of sources, by belonging to the group and by the justification of the agent's own actions; under these conditions, what could correct it can be reinterpreted as confirmation of the threat it attributes to the other. Breaking the cycle then involves creating conditions for previously unconsidered facts, reasons and experiences to change judgment, while action limits protect those affected regardless of that review.

3.4 Why some understandings lead to action while others encounter limits

People exposed to similar influences do not go all the way. Someone can advocate a restrictive immigration policy and reject violence against immigrants. Another may use a similar concern to justify persecution. A model that doesn't explain the difference doesn't explain anything, and a model that erases it under a single label is unfair to the first person. Part of the difference lies in the intermediate choices and their justification, described in Section 3.3; the following concerns the understanding itself and the relationships that keep it open.

Adorno's studies offer the beginning of an explanation at the character level. "The same patterns that make the individual easily offended by what he considers to be the morally permissive behaviour of members of minority groups [...] - if well internalized - would lead him to resist the violence and delinquency that characterize the advanced stages of fascism" (Adorno et al., 2019, p. 138). The difference is not in the content of the values, but in their source: "The conventionalist individual could, with a clear conscience, follow the dictates of

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the external agency wherever they took him" (Adorno et al., 2019, p. 138), whereas the person whose standards are his has a place to refuse. Subjects who resisted prejudice were characterized by a "high rationality", by "a tendency to hesitate, doubt, and qualify their own opinions" and by the ability to see others, "above all, as individuals, not as specimens of a general concept" (Adorno et al., 2019, pp. 317, 590).

Arendt adds the condition to the level of the relationship. Resisting a consistent lie requires "a great deal of confidence in the existence of similar people - relatives, friends, or neighbors - who will never believe 'history'" (Arendt, 2012, ch. 11). Bauman draws the same conclusion from Milgram: "pluralism is the best preventive medicine against morally normal people engaging in morally abnormal actions"; "The voice of individual moral conscience is best heard in the tumult of political and social discord" (Bauman, 1998, ch. 6). The limit that holds the transition from understanding to action is, in both authors, outside the circle of the agent himself: another voice, another presence, a person outside the group whose existence makes the story questionable.

The normative axis adopted here says why this external voice is not polite. "Being the recipient of an answer and being able to recognize what demands it are things that can be separated, and that are just separated in cases where the loss is deepest" (Dietrich, 2026, ch. 11). Whoever is within a form that degrades "does not have, within the form, a place from which comparison could be made"; "The change that struck them was the same that took them from where it would be visible" (Dietrich, 2026, ch. 11). So "listening to the outside is not a courtesy added to the inquiry. It is, in some cases, the only way to do it" (Dietrich, 2026, ch. 11). The agent who made the third deviation withdrew from his universe of obligation the people best placed to tell him what his action meant - in some cases, as the book says, the only way to take the inquiry. That's why refusing to listen to the victims will reappear in Section 6 as a liability criterion.

The question that distinguishes who stops from who goes on can now be stated: What understanding allows the agent to deeply disagree with someone without turning that person into a legitimate recipient of any treatment? The answer that the criterion provides is that the other remains a participant in the shared condition, and that the disagreement - no matter how deeply rooted, no matter how justified - changes what can be claimed against him, not if something is due to him. He who retains this understanding has a limit; he who loses it has no internal limit to his understanding, only the external ones remaining, and will find in each other's reaction a new reason to proceed.

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3.5 The return: action as a new influence

The fifth motion states that the action does not need to close the proceedings. An assault can get approval, produce new reports, invite imitation, and strengthen the identity of the group. The reaction of those affected can be interpreted as confirmation of the threat initially announced. The agent then finds, in the results of his own conduct, new reasons to maintain it.

The force of the proposition must be precisely determined, and it is the force of a well-founded possibility: the action can reinforce its conditions, and cases are examined as to whether and how it did so. Three results need to be distinguished, because the evidence of one is not evidence of the others. The first is the circulation of a narrative that reaffirms the action -- the story of double-header policing, political prisoners, judicial dictatorship -- documented whenever the narrative can be found in circulation. The second is institutional approval or reward -- an indulgence, a law, a public endorsement -- documented by the act itself. The third is the enhancement of understanding of certain agents, documented only where the subsequent statements or conduct of those agents show enhanced understanding. An indulgence demonstrates public reward and legitimacy; it does not in itself demonstrate that the understanding of any beneficiary has changed, and the third result is only asserted where there is evidence of it. Keeping the three separate also protects the proposition against infallibility: the persistence of an understanding cannot be explained by 'insufficient dispute' unless the dispute and its reception can be described independently.

Every element of the return is documented. Adorno's studies observed that "If your external authorities, or the crowd, give approval to this form of aggression, then it can take on the most violent forms and may even persist after the conventional values in whose name it was carried out have been lost sight of" (Adorno et al., 2019, p. 144). Bauman records how, in bureaucratic action, the rebellion of dehumanized objects 'further strengthens the self-esteem and the bonds of camaraderie that bind employees' (Bauman, 1998, ch. 4), so that 'the loneliness of the victim and the combination of his tormentors conditioned and validated each other' (Bauman, 1998, ch. 6). The Ardtian image of the ruler who "persistently insults another person until everyone knows that he is their enemy, so that he can - with some plausibility - kill them in self-defense" (Arendt, 2012, ch. 12) is the described return from the aggressor's side. Fraenkel's description on the community side is complementary: "if there are no real enemies, they have to be created. Without enemies there can be no danger, and without danger there can be no community-oriented attitudes" (Fraenkel, 2017, p. 200).

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The cycle of action and justification has already been described before, and the background should be named. Tavris and Aronson describe "the cycle of action followed by self-justification followed by more committed action" (Tavris & Aronson, 2007, p. 225) and, rather, the "process of imprisonment - action, justification, new action - which increases our intensity and our commitment, and may eventually lead us away from our original intentions or principles" (Tavris & Aronson, 2007, p. 34). Ervin Staub describes the same learning by doing at the group scale: "harmful actions and violence lead to more harmful actions and more violence. [...] People learn by doing and change, for better or worse, as a result of their own actions", so that "individuals change, group norms and patterns of behavior change, and institutions change or are created to serve violence" (Staub, 2011, p. 167), to a "moral inversion" in which killing "passes to be seen as the right and moral thing to do" (Staub, 2011, p. 168). Staub also records the other path, which the fifth proposition, as a possibility, requires: "causing harm to others may lead some to feel guilty, apologize and try to repair their actions", and it is "under the conditions I have described" that "violent actions tend to be followed by justification, which makes more violent action likely" (Staub, 2011, p. 167). What this report adds to this background is the placement of the return within three moments and under the criterion of Section 2, and the distinction, as outlined below, between the results by which a return can be documented.

The digital environment makes the return faster and more internal. Fisher's account of moral contagion research ends with a phrase describing the closing of the cycle within the agent:

> "As you are trained to turn all discussions into cases of great indignation, to express disgust for exogroups, to assert the superiority of your endogroups, over time you will stop doing this in exchange for rewards that come from outside and you will do it simply because you want to. The impulse comes from within. Its nature has changed" (Fisher, 2023, ch. 6)

. The author's account of the person who worn out a shared word in good faith describes the same structure without technology: "Each person began, in good faith, to use it a little beyond its original limit" (Dietrich, 2026, ch. 9), and the trader who "lived from trust while contributing to wear it out" (Dietrich, 2026, ch. 9) consumed the condition that made his action possible. The cycle, in both descriptions, feeds on what it destroys.

Two other features of the return will matter to the cases. First, the denied does not break it. Arendt observed that followers who received "irrefutable proof" of a lie "appeared to cynicism; instead of abandoning the leaders who had lied to them, they would say they always knew the claim was false, and they would admire the leaders for their great tactical cleverness"

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(Arendt, 2012, ch. 11). Second, the political system absorbs speech rather than resisting it. Zaffaroni describes the politician who, "As the politician who intends to confront this discourse will be disqualified and marginalized within his own party, [...] he ends up taking it on, whether by electoral calculation, opportunism or fear" (Zaffaroni, 2011, p. 73). The most consistent form of return, as the Capitol case will show, is the retroactive legitimization of the action by the very source of the influence that produced it.

The stages of this process have been mapped by two research bodies whose results the cycle organizes rather than replaces. Ervin Staub (1989) described a "continuous destruction" during which each harmful act changes the agent and makes the following easier, under difficult living conditions and in a culture that devalues a group; Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko (2008) catalogued twelve mechanisms of political radicalization, including slippery slope, group polarization, and "jujitsu politics", the overreaction of the state that radicalizes a wider audience. The cycle described here is not a thirteenth mechanism. It is the structure within which the mechanisms operate, and it adds what they don't contain: the criterion by which the understanding they produce can be judged.

A point must be fixed before the inquiryination of the cases. Mutual accusation of wrongdoing does not make the conduct morally equivalent. Each action shall continue to require its own assessment in accordance with the criterion of Section 2. The cycle described here is symmetrical in form - any group can enter it - and asymmetrical in content, because at each moment the question is whether a person has been treated as a non-participant, and that question has an answer regardless of which group formulates it.

4. Three episodes

All three episodes are examined with the same four questions. What influences can be documented? What understanding is expressed in the statements of the participants themselves? How was the answer authorized? What limits have been recognized or abandoned? In each case, the search also includes what counts against the thesis: refusal of violence, revision of understanding, opportunistic participation or justification built only after the act.

4.1 Southport, 2024: from protecting children to attacking strangers

On July 29, 2024, three girls were killed in a dance class in Southport, England. The author, Axel Rudakubana, was born in Cardiff into a Christian family of Rwandan origin; he

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was neither a Muslim nor an asylum seeker. Within hours, a fake name - "Ali Al-Shakati", described as a 17-year-old asylum seeker known to security services - circulated on social media. A parliamentary committee recorded after false or unfounded allegations about the attack obtained about 155 million impressions on a single platform in eleven days, that the fake name was viewed 420,000 times, and that the platforms' own trend functions promoted it (House of Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Committee, 2025, §8). The police were prevented by the contempt of court law and guidance from the Public Prosecutor from publicly declaring that the suspect was not a Muslim; the Internal Affairs Committee concluded that the resulting silence "created a vacuum in which disinformation could grow" (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2025, §17). Calls to meet outside the local mosque appeared in private groups "two hours after a vigil" (Dawes, 2024). On 30 July the mosque was attacked; the following week, riots spread to more than two dozen cities; on 4 August, crowds of several hundred people attacked hotels housing asylum seekers in Rotherham and Tamworth, in the first case setting fire to an emergency exit while about two hundred residents were inside (Richardson, 2024b). The inspectors then concluded that there was no "conclusive or compelling evidence" that the disturbances had been premeditated by any organised group; the incitement came predominantly from "disgruntled individuals, influencers or groups", and "most of the people who participated in the disturbances lived on site" (HMICFRS, 2025).

Influence: Influences are documented with unusual accuracy. A false attribution of the crime to a category; previous speech presenting asylum seekers as threats; and mobilization messages coming from far-reaching accounts. A study of more than 230 messages published by a prominent far-right influencer in those ten days found no explicit calls for violence; mobilisation operated indirectly, recoding the troublemakers as "the concerned British public", the government and police as traitors who "took the British too far", and violence as a natural, if necessary response, with the safety of children and national pride as central values (Wischerath et al., 2026). The content was, in the words of one of the authors, "lawful but awful", and it provided all three contents of comprehension at once.

Understanding: The words of the participants themselves show the three deviations. Understanding the facts: a person's crime has become a category crime, and the members of the category - in hotels, in a mosque - have become responsible for it. Moral understanding: a woman who posted, hours after the murders, "Mass deportation now, set fire to all the bloody hotels full of these bastards" added: "If that makes me racist, so be it" (Inman, 2024); under police questioning, she said that she had felt hatred "of the incident and the circumstances, not

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of race" (Court of Appeal, 2025, §12), and the Court of Appeal, in refusing permission to appeal the thirty-one-month sentence, considered the message's words "on their face an incitement to serious violence" (§56) and recorded the pre-sentence report's finding of "underlying racist attitudes" (§64). Understanding the answer: one man arrested in Rotherham told police that he had been detained for a "good cause" (Richardson, 2024b); another told the parole officer that he had "protested and expressed his opinion", and the court deemed him a "front-line participant in a racist and ignorant mob government attempt" (Richardson, 2024a). The value invoked at all stages - the protection of children - was not disputed. What changed was its application: from "protecting children and holding the killer accountable" to "it is permissible to attack people associated with the category to which we attribute the killer".

Answer and boundaries: Understanding the answer has abandoned the boundary that separates who has done something from who only belongs. The residents of the hotel had done nothing; the mosque had done nothing. It is the signature of the third deviation: the damage is directed not to an agent, but to a representative.

The return: Within days, the narrative reorganized around "two-tier policing": the police arresting rioters were portrayed as protectors on the other side, and an incident in which members of the targeted community assaulted a man served to reintroduce the assailants as real victims. (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2025, §75), and a Leeds court arrested two men on the anti-racist side who had attacked anti-immigration protesters, which testifies against the alleged asymmetry (Kearl, 2024). But the mechanism of return is visible in the attempt: the reaction of the victims, and the reaction of the law, were read as confirmation of the threat. Counter-evidence: Much counts against any deterministic reading. Most people exposed to the same influences did nothing. On July 31, Southport residents, many of them white and local, cleaned and repaired the mosque. On 7 August, far-right gatherings planned in more than a hundred places "did not materialize", while tens of thousands of counter-demonstrators showed up (Euronews/AP, 2024). Among those convicted, many had extensive criminal backgrounds and some had links to the far right, suggesting that understanding was not formed out of thin air in a week (HOPE not hate, 2024). One scholar argued that there is "little evidence that disinformation persuades law-abiding citizens to participate in riots" (Reilly, 2024). The model doesn't require you to. It requires that those who acted had an understanding that the act presented as protection and that this understanding was provided and reinforced by identifiable influences. The findings of the courts, the reports of the inspectors and the statements of the participants themselves establish exactly this.

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4.2 The Capitol, 2021: violence as the defense of a constitution

On January 6, 2021, a crowd summoned to Washington by the incumbent president forced their way into the Capitol to prevent certification of an election he lost. The congressional committee that investigated the attack concluded that the president's "false claims" "provoked his supporters to violence" (Select Committee, 2022, Executive Summary). Some 1,583 people have been charged with federal offences, 608 of them for assaulting, resisting or obstructing law enforcement officers (U.S. Attorney's Office, 2025). A sociological analysis of the first 716 defendants found that eighty-six percent had no known affiliation to the militant group, that the majority came from counties won by the elected candidate, and that the group "comes from the mainstream, not just the fringe of society" (Pape, 2022a).

Influence: Influence here is unusually concentrated. A civil society survey of court records identified 210 defendants who stated, in plays, transcripts or interviews, that they were responding to the president's call, and 120 who cited his words as reason to go (CREW, 2024). One defendant wrote that he "believed to be following the instructions of former President Trump"; another, who drove crowded buses, said: "[Trump] called me there and exposed what is happening in our government" (Select Committee, 2022, Executive Summary). Understanding the facts - that the election was stolen - was provided by the country's highest office and amplified by an online movement whose largest group gained more than 300,000 members in one day, with violent content in about forty-three percent of its groups, according to the internal review of the platform itself (Silverman et al., 2021).

Understanding: Among the defendants whose motives were registered, the most frequent was "patriotic duty" (forty-one percent), followed by animosity against the government and belief in stolen election (Pape, 2022b). Understanding the answer appears in a survey finding: Among Americans who believed the election was stolen, 46 percent agreed that "true American patriots may have to resort to violence to save our country", versus 23 percent of the general population (PRRI/Brookings, 2023). The passage from fact to answer is visible in the words of one defendant to investigators: "I thought he was asking for help. I thought we were doing the right thing" (CREW, 2024). Here the good invoked was not the protection of a community against a category, but the protection of a political order against a procedure presented as fraudulent - a difference compared to Southport that the comparison will explore.

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Answer and limits: The abandoned limit was what separates challenging an outcome through the institutions from preventing an institutional act by force. What's striking is how many participants recognized the limit in retrospect. One defendant, who said in the days following the attack that she was "basically following my president", later said, "I bought a lie, and the lie is the lie, and that's embarrassing" (Hall, 2021). Another told the committee: "Basically, the president left everyone excited, sent them down there. We were just doing what he said", and testified that his group left the building as soon as the president's message to go home appeared (NBC Chicago/AP, 2022). The same source that mobilized could demobilize; the limit, for these participants, was internal to the cycle, and a limit of this kind is what the sixth proposition gives reasons to consider insufficient on its own.

The return: The Capitol case provides the clearest instance of the second result of the return, the institutional reward. Four years after the attack, the president whose allegations had formed the understanding of the participants granted "full, complete and unconditional pardon" to all the other convicts and commuted to time served the sentences of fourteen members of two organized groups, including the founder of one of them, describing the allegations as "a grave national injustice" (Trump, 2025). The action was thus rewarded by the very source of the influence that produced it, and the punishment was publicly recodified as persecution. The indulgence documents the reward and public legitimacy; it does not, by itself, show that the understanding of any beneficiary has been strengthened. The third result would only be documented for certain agents where their own words showed a strengthened understanding in contrast to a previous position. The available words show less than this: when the leader of one of the organized groups, at the sentencing and before any pardon, called each defendant a "political prisoner" and said he wanted to be "an American Solzhenitsyn" (NPR, 2023), the statement documents the persistence and public reaffirmation of the justifying understanding, not its strengthening, that would require a contrast to his previous position to the act that the record does not provide. For many who have pleaded guilty and repented, the effect of forgiveness on their understanding is unknown, and the argument does not affirm it.

The refusal was decisive. The vice president refused to reject the electoral votes; a state official told the president that "the data you have is wrong" (Select Committee, 2022, ch. 2); police kept the line at the cost of hundreds of wounded. Many participants pleaded guilty and expressed regret; a court noted about one of them that "although I think you're sincere, what you did was terrible" (BuzzFeed News, 2021), which is the bench's first articulated proposition.

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Opportunism and organized conspiracy coexisted with sincere belief, and the model need not deny either.

4.3 Brasília, 2023: the salvation of the nation and the awaited savior

On January 8, 2023, a week after the president-elect took office in October 2022, several thousand people marched from a camp outside Army headquarters and stormed the headquarters of the Executive, Legislative and Supreme Court. The camps lasted for more than two months, under tracks that said "S.O.S. Armed Forces, save our nation" and called for "military intervention" (O Povo, 2022). The invasion was openly called on the internet for days under the code "Selma party", with transportation and meals offered in groups of tens of thousands of members (Aos Fatos, 2023; Agência Lupa, 2023). More than 1,800 people were removed from the camp the next day, 1,159 of them arrested (SBT News, 2023). By April 2026, the Federal Supreme Court had received 1,878 complaints and held 1,402 people liable, 552 of them for non-prosecution agreements with confession, convictions for crimes of coup and violent abolition of the democratic rule of law (Supremo Tribunal Federal, 2026a). The former president and seven allies were convicted in September 2025 for leading the plan of which the invasion was the final act (Supremo Tribunal Federal, 2025).

Influence: The influences combined an unproven narrative of electoral fraud with the expectation that the Armed Forces would act under a constitutional article read as authorizing intervention. A message circulated in the days leading up to the invasion called on truckers, farmers and registered shooters to "unseat all the rats that have seized power"; a video with 820,000 views called for a "military revolution" (Aos Fatos, 2023). A monitored message anticipated the tactic: "Never start an invasion without a crowd taking all 3 powers at once" (Folha de Pernambuco, 2023).

Understanding: Understanding the facts - that the election was stolen - was the content of the tracks, the camp and the summons messages. Its persistence in the political environment, although not among the January 8 participants themselves, is indicated by a survey conducted at a rally of the former president's supporters more than a year later, in which eighty-eight percent maintained that the defeated candidate had actually won and ninety-four percent agreed that the judiciary's "excesses and persecution" characterized the situation as a dictatorship (Poder360, 2024a); the sample comes from that rally, and what it shows is the narrative's durability in that milieu, rather than the defendants' state of mind. Moral understanding has

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turned the elected government and court into enemies of the nation, not adversaries within it. Understanding the answer, however, had a trait that distinguishes Brasilia from Washington. Many participants did not understand themselves as agents of the decisive act; they understood themselves as a trigger for a savior to act on their behalf. The first convicted defendant had travelled on a chartered bus "with the sole reason, stated by him in testimony, to participate in a demonstration of support for military intervention" (Supremo Tribunal Federal, 2023). A digital militia post attached to the police report complained that "Of nineteen generals, these five scumbags do not accept the people's proposal" (Correio Braziliense, 2024). Violence was understood as summoning.

Answer and boundaries: The abandoned boundary was the same as Washington's: the passage from challenging to preventing. But the limit he resisted was different and instructive. The commanders of the Army and Air Force refused, in late 2022, to accept the draft decree that would give legal form to the plan; one of them testified that his counterpart "asserted that if such an act were attempted he would have to arrest the President of the Republic", and that "If the commander had failed, possibly the coup attempt would have been consummated" (Poder360, 2024c). The interruption did not come from the review of the participants' understanding. It came from people whose consent the plan required and who denied it - an external limit in the exact sense of the sixth proposition.

The return: Of the three results distinguished in section 3.5, the first two are documented and the third is not. The rehabilitating narrative circulated: the former president called the detainees "poor poor" and declared, "What is a coup? It is a tank on the street, a gun, a conspiracy. None of this has been done in Brazil" (Poder360, 2024b), and the recently cited survey shows the narrative of the largely sustained judicial dictatorship in its midst. The institutional reward has been partially followed and remains contested: in December 2025 the Legislature passed, and on 30 April 2026 confirmed by presidential veto, a law (Lei 15.402, de 8 de maio de 2026) that reduces the sentences of those convicted of events (Câmara dos Deputados, 2026); on 9 May 2026, Alexandre de Moraes, also rapporteur on unconstitutionality actions, suspended the application of the law in criminal executions indicated until the dispute was defined by the Plenary (Supremo Tribunal Federal, 2026b). Until 27 October 2026, the date of the submission of this text, no decision of the Plenary had been notified. Punishment has not been erased, as in the United States; it has been recodified by the Legislature as excessive, and recodification is now itself before the court whose sentences it would reduce.

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Whether this recoding is the return of the cycle or the correction of an excessive response is a question that the model needs to leave open, rather than decide by description, because there is a serious rival reading. According to the criterion set out in Section 7 - reaction in the normal and proportional manner - a legislative reduction of sentences could be normality reaffirming against a disproportionate judicial reaction, and the dissenting minister's objection that no one can be punished for contempt is the judicial form of this reading. Who promulgates the reduction and who benefits from it are relevant clues, not sufficient criteria: allies can sponsor a correction that was necessary, and opponents can sustain a punishment that was excessive. The judgment also requires the grounds offered, the effects produced, the proportion between the acts and the penalties before and after, and the application of the measure to situations comparable or only to it. Brazilian law is marked in different directions: its provisions of proportionality are general in form; its political sponsorship and the concomitant public denial that there was an attempted coup are not; and whether the penalties it reduces were disproportionate is a question of criminal law which this argument does not resolve. The suspension adds another layer: the court that imposed the penalties is now the court that decides whether the law that reduces them survives, which is exactly the configuration in which a rehabilitative narrative of judicial prosecution finds its material, whatever the merits of the decision. The case thus shows that the law is the medium in which return and correction are more difficult to distinguish, and the question is brought to section 7 as an institutional problem derived from the argument, not as a verdict on the norm.

Counter-evidence: Hundreds of non-prosecution agreements that require a confession cannot be counted as instances of revised understanding; a confession may result from revision, defensive strategy, convenience or some combination of these, and the agreements do not say which. Reading them as a review would make the inference against which the argument warns - attributing an intimate understanding to a conduct that admits several explanations. What the agreements show is only that a path back to legality has been offered and accepted. A participant's words are more informative. The participant who wrote "Lost, Mané" on a statue in front of the court said to the court in testimony given in November 2024 and released in 2025: "I wanted to apologize to the Democratic Rule of Law"; "In the heat of the moment, I felt different from the person I am"; and that she had become repulsed by politics (Agência Brasil, 2025). His statement is ambiguous in a way that the model foresees: it combines revision of the response with denial of the political significance of the act, which is the retrospective form of

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the evil hidden from the agent. And military refusal shows, once again, that people under the same influence can refuse action that others have understood to be their duty.

4.4 What the comparison shows

The three episodes differ in the claimed good: the protection of a community against a category, the protection of a constitution against a procedure, the salvation of a nation by a savior. They differ in purpose: strangers who had done nothing, institutions and the people who defended them, government headquarters waiting for others to complete the act. And they differ in outcome: punishment maintained and confirmed in appeal; punishment erased by forgiveness; punishment maintained, reduced by law, and reduction suspended pending constitutionality review.

What they share is the structure the thesis describes. In each case, the understanding of the facts attributed to a category or an institution an error that was not established. In each case, moral understanding removed the targeted persons - asylum seekers, lawmakers and police officers, judges and elected government - from the circle of those to whom something is due. In each case, understanding the response presented the damage as protection, and the damage fell on people who had done nothing to the agent. In each case, the first result of the return is documented: a narrative circulated that revived the action (two-pocket policing, political prisoners, judicial dictatorship). In two, the second is documented: institutional reward, total in indulgence and partial in law. The third - the strengthening of the understanding of certain agents - is not documented in any of the three; what the Capitol record shows, for the leaders of organized groups, is the persistence and public reaffirmation of the justifying understanding after conviction, which is less than strengthening. In England, the court findings and the absence of a political sponsor left the narrative without an institution to reward it. That is the standard that the fifth proposition, as a well-founded possibility, leads us to look for, and that is all that the cases establish. And in each case, the interruption that mattered came from outside the agent's circle: from courts, from a vice president and a state official, and from commanders who refused to sign.

The comparison also shows what the model does not explain. It does not explain who among the exposed will act; the most common profile in the three cases excludes a simple explanation by predisposition, and the criminal record in one of them excludes a simple explanation by novelty. It doesn't explain the organized core that you planned, in two cases,

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with full knowledge of what you were doing. And it does not distinguish, by itself, between sincere belief and staged belief; the distinction was made by the courts, through the inquiryination of statements before, during and after the act, and the model is based on that examination rather than replacing it.

5. Rivals and objections

5.1 Four rival explanations

A model only gains its place if it adds determination or explanatory force to the reports that already exist. Four working bodies explain the same facts without the thesis, and each needs to be faced in its strongest form.

Virtuous violence: Alan Fiske and Tage Rai (2014) argue that most violence is morally motivated: those who practice it live it as compulsory, as the correct way to create, sustain, terminate or honor a social relationship. The assertion is supported by cultures and types of violence, the crime of war honour, and this argument stems from proximity to it, not against it. Fiske and Rai are careful to separate their own normative judgment from the moral experience of the perpetrators, and they clearly say that they consider most of the violence they describe to be immoral; its purpose is explicit, and a theory of justice is not part of it. The thesis here defended does not depend on the rarity of the modality - a frequent modality still requires explanation - and is not intended to explain violence better than they do. What it does is take the understanding that they show present in the perpetrator and ask him two more questions: how that understanding is formed, by what content converts a forbidden response into a demanded response and how the action returns to it; and by what criterion, regardless of the perpetrator's conviction, it can be assessed. The contribution, if any, lies in this articulation - influence, the three contents, action and return, under a criterion of justice - and not in the mere addition of a normative assessment to their report, which by itself would show nothing.

The elaborate model of social identity: Stephen Reicher, John Drury and Clifford Stott have shown, over three decades, that crowd violence emerges from intergroup dynamics on the ground, especially from interaction with the police: an indiscriminate police response reconfigures the social identity of the crowd and legitimizes conflict at the moment (Reicher, 1996; Drury & Reicher, 2000; Reicher & Stott, 2011). The study by Drury and colleagues on English disorders of 2024 belongs to this school (Drury et al., 2026). The model is not limited to the moment of action: it treats the behaviour of crowds as an expression of social identities

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that carry cultural and historical content, and describes how these identities are interpreted and transformed in the relationships between groups. It therefore explains an important part of the path that this argument reconstructes - how a shared understanding of "us", "them" and what is legitimate is formed and changed - and the case studies of Drury and colleagues on 2024, for descriptive purposes, document for these same events the intergroup dynamics on which the model rests. This argument takes you as an interlocutor, not a competitor. What its philosophical organization adds is, first, the separation of the contents of understanding, which the model of social identity treats as a single configuration of identity and norms; second, the placement of the legitimacy that the crowd builds under a criterion of justice that the model, as an explanatory theory, neither provides nor needs to provide; and, third, the extension of the account beyond the crowd, to the institutional return - the indulgence, the law - where the object of the model of social identity ends. None of this diminishes the explanatory scope of the model; it locates what the argument contributes alongside it.

Radicalisation mechanisms: McCauley and Moskalenko's twelve mechanisms (2008) and the theory of the search for meaning by Arie Kruglanski and colleagues (2014) explain the shift to aggravated violence, loss of meaning, group polarization, and channeling a search for meaning into an ideological narrative. Even closer is the structure that Staub reports of Kruglanski and his collaborators, for whom a terrorist ideology consists of "an aggressor, to whom some form of injustice is inherent, a guilty or guilty actor who is held responsible for the aggressor, and a method, terrorism, considered morally justifiable because it responds to a great injustice" (Staub, 2011, p. 365). Agreeable, guilty and justifiable method approach the three contents distinguished in section 3.2 - an injustice suffered, a person or category held liable, an authorized response - and the breakdown here offered cannot be presented as entirely new. Nor is it the same: the three contents are not restricted to terrorist ideology; they are formulated as questions to which any understanding answers, and not as components of a doctrine; and each is paired with a characteristic deviation judged by the criterion of section 2, so what the articulation adds is the normative assessment of due consideration and authorized response. They are psychological mechanisms of the moment of understanding, and the argument absorbs them in sections 3.2 to 3.4 instead of competing with them. What the proposal does is to bring these mechanisms together in a reconstruction of action guided by an explicit criterion of justice and to accompany its implications for the institutional response and for the possible return of the cycle; whether this articulation deserves its place is judged by the work it does in cases and not by some absence attributed to literature.

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Dispositional and situational accounts of common perpetrators: Adorno's studies explain adherence by character, and appear above as support; they are also a rival, because in their account, understanding is impulse rationalization, and not a training that can be treated in its own terms. The answer is that the studies themselves provide: they situate the difference between who goes on and who refuses not in the content of the values, but in whether or not they are proper to the agent (section 3.4), which is a fact about understanding, not about the impulse; and where the justification is only rationalization constructed after the act, the model does not apply (section 5.2). Christopher Browning's study of a reserve police battalion (1992) explains the participation of ordinary men in mass murder by conformity, career, and routine, with a lesser, though not despicable, role of ideological indoctrination; Harald Welzer (2005) explains it by a shift from the normative frame of reference within which killing has become common work and even moral achievement. Welzer's report is the closest antecedent to the present one: its chart shift is the deviation of the three contents described in section 3.2. The difference is that Welzer and Browning explain perpetrators within an institution that has already redefined the framework for them; the cases examined here involve people outside any such institution, who adopted the framework from influences they could have refused, and that is why the question of liability is put in a different way (section 6). The "magnitude gap" of Roy Baumeister (1997) - the systematic difference between how perpetrators and victims perceive the same act - is the psychological observation on which the asymmetry between victim and agent that the whole argument is based.

5.2 Four objections

Four objections put the model to the test, and each, when answered, makes the thesis more accurate.

The agent only invents an excuse after acting: If the justification is constructed after the fact, the understanding has not guided the action, and the cycle collapses into rationalization. Zimbardo himself describes the justifications for destroying an enemy as "actually later reflections, proposed explanations for the official record" (Zimbardo, 2007, p. 11), and Paxton insists that one should avoid "identifying fascism more with what he said than with what he did" (Paxton, 2007, p. 36). The answer distinguishes the understanding that guides the action from the justification constructed afterwards. The latter exists and fuels subsequent actions, which is part of the return. But the cases contain justifications that preceded the act - the

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message published hours after the murders and days before the hotel attacks, the calls to "unseat the rats" issued days before the invasion, the "patriotic duty" cited by defendants who had crossed a country to fulfill it - and the courts distinguished the two by examining their chronology. Bandura's finding that people 'do not usually engage in harmful conduct until they have justified for themselves the morality of their actions' (Bandura, 2016, p. 49) and Staub's observation that the evolution of harm 'can become apparent and can be assessed when historical continuity over time is examined' (Staub, 2011, p. 166) support the same distinction on the research side. Where the justification is only retrospective, the model doesn't apply, and it says so. Paxton's method supports, rather than undermines, this answer: ideas must be inferred from actions, and the actions here were consistent with previously expressed understandings.

You call it wrong what you disagree with: The objection would be fatal if the criterion of injustice were the author's preferences. - It is not. The criterion is the treatment of a participant as a non-participant, and applies to the group with which the author identifies as any other. Neiman notes that "There may be no general principle proving that torture or genocide is wrong, but that does not prevent us from considering them paradigmatic of evil" (Neiman, 2003, Introdução), and that "evils cannot be compared, but must be distinguished" (Neiman, 2003, Introdução). The distinction between restrictive policy and concrete injustice, outlined in Section 2, is the operational form of the response: a position can be fought without being called evil, and the criterion is only satisfied when a person is removed from the circle of consideration. The author's normative work prevents the accusative use of her floor: "Nothing is easier than to say in an uncomfortable way that she lives by keeping others below the floor", and the assertion requires three demonstrations - who is kept below, to what extent, and that form would not survive without it - because "The answer is not obtained by indignation" (Dietrich, 2026, ch. 18). The Leeds convictions in the Southport case, in which the courts punished offenders on the anti-racist side by the same standard, show the criterion applied symmetrically.

The model explains anything, and therefore nothing:

A model that fits all cases cannot be tested. The answer is that the model has conditions, and that their absence is observable. Arendt provides the test for the difference between an explanation and an ideology: an ideology is one for which "no experience teaches anything because everything is understood in this coherent process of logical deduction" (Arendt, 2012,

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ch. 13). The model here proposed requires evidence of three things - an accepted influence, an understanding that presents harm as good, and a relationship between that understanding and action - and the mere temporal sequence of influence and violence does not satisfy it. Section 4.4 listed what the model leaves unexplained, section 5.1 granted four rivals what each explains, and section 3.1 identified cases, documented by the same research documenting influence, in which influence was present and action was not followed. Hobsbawm's observation that "The Depression did not automatically lead to the suspension or abolition of representative democracy" (Hobsbawm, 1995, ch. 4) states the general form: the same condition produced the New Deal and the Third Reich, and the understanding that mediated between condition and outcome is exactly what the model isolates.

Understanding the offender weakens his responsibility: It is the most serious objection, and receives an extensive response in the next section. The short form is that of Zimbardo: 'trying to understand the situational and systemic contributions to the behaviour of any individual does not excuse the person or absolve him of responsibility' (Zimbardo, 2007, p. xi); 'psychological analysis is not 'excusiology' (excusiology) ' (Zimbardo, 2007, p. 231). Arendt's preface sentence governs the whole endeavor: "Understanding does not mean denying the shocking in the facts, eliminating the unheard of from them, or, in explaining phenomena, using analogies and generalizations that diminish the impact of reality and the shock of experience" (Arendt, 2012, Prefácio). Neiman's warning, however, must be taken seriously and not distorted: an explanation that traces the origin of evil "into a series of well-intentioned errors" threatens to "mine the very responsibility it sought to justify" (Neiman, 2003, ch. 4). The model avoids this outcome only if it provides liability criteria that do not depend on the content of the agent's conscience. He supplies them.

6. Responsibility within the cycle

Explaining the formation of an understanding does not in itself determine the responsibility of those who act on it. Neiman's wording is the adopted one: it is not about "denying your responsibility, but [seeking] responsibility elsewhere than the content of the soul" (Neiman, 2003, ch. 4). Where, then?

The question has its own philosophical literature, that of culpable ignorance, and the argument must take a stand within it, because the agent of evil concealed in itself is, according to that literature, an agent who acts in ignorance of the moral character of his act. Two positions

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mark the boundaries of debate. Zimmerman (1997) argues that guilt for an ignorant behavior should be traced back to guilt involving conscience; Rosen (2003) argues that guilt for an action performed in ignorance requires guilt for ignorance itself, including moral guilt. These are demanding conditions, the application of which must be examined individually. Sher (2009, chs. 6–8) proposes an alternative in which responsibility without awareness may depend on the available information, an applicable epistemic pattern and the constitutive psychology of the agent, the latter required in conjunction with failure to meet that standard, rather than in its place. The position here adopted is based on the Moody-Adams (1994, pp. 296, 301–303) report on affected ignorance: the ignorance of those who avoid knowing what they could and should know. Moody-Adams examines the refusal to question practices, the evasion of evidence and the refusal to acknowledge one's own fallibility, admitting degrees of guilt (1994, pp. 296, 301–303). The application of this analysis in this article requires examining effective access, capacity, reasons for doubt and research opportunities. The four criteria below are specifications of these questions within the cycle, and each admits degrees. Explaining the formation of an understanding does not automatically excuse the agent; nor does it automatically condemn him. Arendt's judgment on Eichmann offers a related point: his failure was not a defect of intelligence, but sheer *thoughtlessness*, the inability to think from another's point of view (Arendt, 1999); Moody-Adams (1994, p. 298) relies on the same judgment to argue that evil is usually the work of normal people.

Four criteria allow you to locate responsibility within the cycle without requiring access to the content of the agent's conscience, and each is a matter of degree. The first is access to contrary reasons. Where reports contradicting the understanding from which the agent acted - a police statement that the suspect was not what the rumor said, the correction of the data by a secretary of state, the repeated checks by an electoral court - were effectively accessible to him, were intelligible to him and were not reports that he had independent reason to suspect, the failure to consult them weighs heavily on him; where any of these conditions are missing, weigh less or do not weigh heavily. Neiman describes crimes such as those of Eichmann as dependent on "the recklessness, the refusal to use reason as we should" (Neiman, 2003, ch. 4).

The second is the possibility of revision. Where understanding was reviewable - where the agent was not isolated, was not under duress, had time - persistence in it is attributable.

The third is the deliberate refusal to listen to the victims. This criterion derives directly from the normative axis: since listening to outsiders is "in some cases the only way" to examine what an action does (Dietrich, 2026, ch. 11), the agent who withdrew those affected from his

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universe of obligation has disabled the only instrument that could have corrected it, and is responsible for that withdrawal. Adorno's studies describe the structure from within: for the biased person, "many of the ideas and observations necessary for an adequate assessment are not allowed in this assessment" (Adorno et al., 2019, p. 150), and the exclusion remains because "they have cut the contacts through which any modification of their formula could occur" (Adorno et al., 2019, p. 267).

The fourth is the agent's participation in the production of the justifications themselves. Whoever shares the rumor, writes the post, charters the bus or writes the decree is not merely the recipient of an understanding; he is its co-author, and his responsibility is correspondingly greater. Here the distinction drawn in Section 3.1 between intended and unintended influence does its job. The algorithm that ordered the false name has no one to answer for the understanding it helped form, and the responsibility it displaces does not disappear; it falls on who designed the order knowing its effects, on who fed it and on who acted on it. An order without author does not produce acts without agents.

These criteria preserve differences that a single label would erase: between error, negligence, deliberate closure and deliberate manipulation. The woman who wrote the message, the man who called it a "good cause", the influencer who recodified the rioters as a "concerned public", the president who summoned the crowd and then forgave them, and the engineer who understood "that anger was a colossal source of energy" occupy different positions in the cycle, and their responsibility differs accordingly. The author's normative work distinguishes three of these positions in any reorganization from a shared condition: "He who acts reorganizes; he who holds, supports the reorganization; and he who repeats, as he repeats, can no longer be called a stranger to it" (Dietrich, 2026, ch. 22). The crowd is not exonerated by its size - "The sum of a thousand gestures that do not reorganize continues to not reorganize", but the gestures that have reorganized are, each, attributable - and whoever stops is not exonerated by distance.

The good faith of the agent is also irrelevant. Where the above criteria are satisfied, good faith focuses on the extent of responsibility; where they are not - where the means of knowledge were lacking or inaccessible - it can focus on their existence, and the argument does not exclude this result. Three things still need to be kept separate, and the four criteria do not separate them by themselves: moral responsibility for acting out of a misunderstanding; the conditions under which censorship is appropriate, which depend on the degrees just described; and criminal imputation, which rests on legal assumptions - the definition of crime, the standards of malice and knowledge, the exclusions - which philosophical criteria neither

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provide nor replace. Zimbardo's rule is correct within the first two: whoever acts immorally 'should still be held accountable and accountable legally' but, 'when determining the severity of the penalty, the situational and systemic factors that caused their behaviour must be taken into account' (Zimbardo, 2007, p. 231). The courts in the three cases have drawn distinctions of this type - leaders of followers, planners of the 'taken by the crowd', who incited who was incited - according to their own legislation of individualisation of the penalty; convergence is not an application of the model criteria, but shows that the criteria accompany distinctions that legal practice already treats as relevant.

7. Interrupting the cycle

The sixth proposition states that there are reasons to combine protection, containment and openness to review, because preventing an action does not in itself transform the understanding that authorized it. Four outcomes need to be kept separate, as an intervention can achieve one without reaching the others: interrupting an ongoing aggression; reducing the possibility of its recurrence; reviewing the justification that authorized it; and weakening the collective process that underpins it. Cases provide instances where one of these results was achieved without evidence of the others. The participants who left the Capitol when the President's message appeared were interrupted, and their exit says nothing about whether the justification was revised; obeying the source who mobilized them is not revision, and the episode is evidence only that an internal limit to the cycle can stop an action and can be lifted as easily by the same source. Prison and punishment, in all three cases, have disrupted the conduct of the prisoners; whether they dissuaded others is a distinct question, which the cases do not answer; and in some agents understanding has survived both and re-encoded them as persecution. Staub's review of de-radicalisation programmes shows the same separation: some programmes "only question and try to change beliefs in the use of violence, not beliefs about democracy" (Staub, 2011, p. 366), and some of those who have stopped engaging in violent acts "continued to serve their group in other ways" (Staub, 2011, p. 367). Nothing here states that interruption requires all four outcomes, nor that a universal combination is necessary; what the cases establish is that each outcome is different, that achieving one does not reach the others, and that an intervention aimed at only one should not be credited by the others. What follows is a set of proposals ordered by the time each one acts, each one anchored in a documented

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failure and a documented success, offered as directions whose effectiveness must be tested, not presumed. At the time of influence

Fill the void: The biggest institutional failure in the Southport case was silence. The police chief wanted to declare on the second day that the suspect was not a Muslim and was advised not to do so; the inspectors concluded that the police should fill the "information gap" with accurate and timely communication, and that "police cannot be passive when public safety is at risk" (HMICFRS, 2025). The Internal Affairs Committee has recommended a communication protocol from the Public Prosecutor for such times (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2025, §17). The principle is generalized: an understanding of the facts is formed in hours, and the institution that can correct it needs to be authorized in advance to speak. The repeated public demonstrations of the integrity of the vote by the Brazilian electoral court were an attempt of this kind; their limited scope shows that correction needs to be delivered where understanding is formed, and not just where the institution feels comfortable.

Reducing what has been shown to be false in times of crisis: The UK parliamentary committee found that the Online Security Act did not contain "measures relating to algorithmic downsizing in times of crisis" and recommended that platforms be required to "algorithmically identify and prioritize deceptive content already verified" during such periods (House of Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Committee, 2025, §§15–18, 31). It is a limit that does not depend on the consent of the agent, applied not to people but to the amplification mechanism, and justified by the empirical finding that moral-emotional content spreads more within one side than between sides (Brady et al., 2017). He does not censor the statement; he refuses to reward it. The proposal has a serious rival, and the rival should not be ruled out: by objecting to freedom of expression, the evidence that disinformation turns law-abiding people into rioters is thin (Reilly, 2024), and a power to downplay content in crisis is a power that will be used beyond crises. Two limits respond to the objection without eliminating it. The object of the measure is not hate speech in general, but what Susan Benesch (2013) calls dangerous speech - speech that raises the risk of collective violence, assessed by speaker, audience, message, context, and the like - and the damage it faces is what Jeremy Waldron (2012) identifies: the public assurance, due to members of a vulnerable group, that they will not be attacked for who they are, and that the false attribution of a child's murder to their category destroys it. And the measure is confined to the content already proven to be false and to the period of a declared crisis, which is the scope in which the parliamentary committee formulated

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it. Within these limits the measure is proportionate; outside of them the objection prevails and the proposal does not go beyond them.

Introducing friction and targeting the few: The evidence Fisher reports suggests that interruption at this time does not have to be total to be effective. When a platform added a single step before resharing, reshares fell by one-fifth and misinformation declined along with them (Fisher, 2023, ch. 12); when Reddit closed two major hate communities in 2015, users from those communities who remained active on the platform substantially reduced their use of hate language, by at least eighty percent according to the measure used by the authors, without a significant increase in that use in the receiving communities, although the study does not rule out migration to other sites (Chandrasekharan et al., 2017, pp. 31:1, 31:10–31:11); when German police visited, with evidence, residents who had shared a false rumor early in its spread, "With the exception of one resident, everyone removed or corrected their posts" (Fisher, 2023, ch. 8). A small number of "superpostors" function as a moral benchmark: "Even though none of these superpostors have explicitly endorsed violence, . . . the aggregate effect of their anti-refugee and anti-government messages probably passed the sense that vigilante violence would be tolerated, even encouraged" (Fisher, 2023, ch. 8). The proposal is the legal and institutional recognition of this asymmetry: accountability and, where permitted by law, civil responsibility, concentrated on the few who shape the understanding of the many.

Multiply the interlocutors: The influence that forms a closed understanding operates by removing the like "who will never believe the 'story'". Bauman's inference from Milgram - pluralism as 'the best preventive medicine' (Bauman, 1998, ch. 6) - and the residents of Southport who repaired the mosque point to the same thing: the presence, in the agent's own environment, of people who contest the attribution of collective guilt. This cannot be legislated, but it can be protected and financed, and it can become visible at the moment when it matters, as the counter-demonstrations of 7 August made it visible. At the time of understanding Treat the three contents separately: The most practical consequence of the analysis of section 3.2 is that correcting the facts is necessary and insufficient. A person who is convinced that the Southport murderer was born in Britain can continue to argue that asylum seekers are not owed what is owed to citizens. Interventions aimed at understanding must therefore ask explicitly which content has failed: the facts, the circle of consideration or the authorization of the response. The fact-checking achieves the first; it leaves the second and third intact, and an intervention that stops there will find the corrected person as willing to act as soon as possible. Do Bandura places turn this into a diagnosis that can be applied to any agent or any justification:

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does he deny the damage, or minimize it; shift responsibility to whoever ordered or to the crowd; or does he acknowledge the damage and his part in it and maintain that the victim deserves it (Bandura, 2016, pp. 2–3, 90)? Each answer calls for a different intervention, and the third - one in which suffering is known and considered deserved - is one in which simply demonstrating the existence of suffering tends to be insufficient. Even there, the attribution of merit may depend on a false accusation, collective responsibility or a mistaken belief about the available alternatives, and information about the victim's experience may have repercussions on moral consideration, as the discussion on contact in the section admits; therefore, the factual attributions and the normative grounds underpinning this attribution must also be examined. The three contents remain distinct for analysis without being impermeable compartments, and the reply to a claim of merit that survives the inquiryination of the facts is the criterion of section 2, not a new correction.

Making the error admissible: Section 3.3 showed that review can be viewed as a threat to the agent's image of himself, and that attacks on that image can intensify the defense. Tavris and Aronson observe that when faced with someone who has been deceived, "with the best of intentions, we do exactly what guarantees to make things worse: preach, rebuke, intimidate, entreat, or threaten", and that an accusation that means "our, how foolish you are" leads the person "to hold back even more from himself" and to invest more in proving that what he thought "was perfectly reasonable" (Tavris & Aronson, 2007, p. 231). The alternative they propose is to keep cognitions separate: "When I, a decent and intelligent person, make a mistake, I remain a decent and intelligent person, and the mistake continues to be a mistake. Now, how can I remedy what I have done?" (Tavris & Aronson, 2007, p. 232). Their evidence relates to victims of fraud; transporting it to perpetrators of political violence is an enforcement hypothesis, not a proven effectiveness. The wording that this argument can support is this: an answer can condemn the conduct and demand redress while preserving the possibility for the agent to acknowledge what he did, and is more likely to be received if it does not require him to confess that he was never anything other than an aggressor. This is not an acquittal, and it does not guarantee change; it removes one of the reasons the agent has not to change. The reflective distance that Tavris and Aronson recommend - "putting a small space between what we feel and how we respond, inserting a moment of reflection" (Tavris & Aronson, 2007, pp. 225–226) - is the individual form of the same condition.

Making reason audible: If judgment comes first and reason serves it, as Haidt argues, the question is not only whether a corrective reason is true, but whether it can be heard. Haidt's

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own answer is that reasons offered by others "sometimes change our intuitions and our judgments", that friends "can challenge us" as we cannot challenge ourselves, and that to change a mind you need to "talk to their elephants" and "see things from that person's angle, beyond their own" (Haidt, 2012, ch. 2). Festinger's analysis points in the same direction on the other side: the agent avoids or belittles the sources he hopes will disturb him (Festinger, 1957, pp. 128, 182), so that the sources he can still consider - a relative, a neighbor, a member of his own community, an ex-participant - are those through which a contradiction can reach judgment rather than defenses. Staub draws the practical conclusion from the study of extremist ideologies: "frontal attacks on extremist ideologies rarely work. But sitting together, persisting in dialogue, if necessary for long periods, can produce change, especially if dialogue also leads to constructive actions" (Staub, 2011, p. 319); and "trying to deny an ideology has less chance of changing people strongly committed to it than offering an alternative that speaks to minds and hearts and meets the needs that the original ideology served" (Staub, 2011, p. 366). Two questions therefore belong to any attempt at revision: what sources this agent can still consider, and what personal and social burdens he associates with admitting that he was wrong. None of this replaces the criterion by which understanding is judged; it concerns the conditions under which judgment can be delivered.

Individualizing before assigning: The first deviation - a mistake made by a person and attributed to the category to which he or she is associated - is answered by a requirement that can be taught: before someone is called to account for a harm, he or she must show what that person has done. The requirement has two grounds. The first is the very criterion of section 2, which concerns acts of people who reorganize what others live from; a category reorganizes nothing, and the author's book distinguishes who acts, who holds, and who repeats, adding that "The sum of a thousand gestures that do not reorganize continues not to reorganize" (Dietrich, 2026, ch. 22) - belonging to a category is not one of the three positions. The second is the principle of personal responsibility that the guaranteeing tradition places at the basis of any legitimate criminal response: the person is liable for his own actions and for nothing else (Ferrajoli, 2002; Zaffaroni, 2011, p. 25). The requirement disarms the collective attribution at its root, because such attributions almost never survive it: the hotel residents did not kill the children; the legislators did not steal the election; the judges did not falsify the count. Günther's distinction between justification and enforcement makes the work complementary to the third deviation: the 'protect children' standard is granted, and the question becomes whether this person is a threat and whether this answer fits (Günther, 1993). A civic education that teaches

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these two questions - who exactly did this, and this answer fits this person? - teaches resistance to the cycle without teaching any particular policy. Monitoring the framework: Zimbardo's practical conclusion is that "the way issues are framed is often more influential than persuasive arguments within their boundaries" (Zimbardo, 2007, p. 454), and that "ideologies should be required to be sufficiently elaborate to allow rhetoric to be separated from substance" and "try to determine whether the recommended means someday justify potentially harmful ends" (Zimbardo, 2007, p. 453). Paxton's criterion for recognizing fascism - "understanding how the fascism of the past worked, and not checking the colors of their shirts" (Paxton, 2007, p. 334) - is the historical form of the same surveillance. Understanding the response is the content most susceptible to reframing, and reframing often ranges from "harm" to "protection". Naming that replacement, the moment it is offered, is a skill, and it can be taught.

Hearing the victims as a condition of judgment: The criterion in Section 2 implies that no assessment of an action against a group is complete until the group has been heard, because the victims occupy a position from which loss is visible in a way that is not from the agent's position, even if they are not the only ones able to see it and even if their report is not infallible. This takes institutional forms: victims' participation in sentencing, which the British courts used; restorative meetings, which Brazilian non-prosecution agreements could incorporate; and, before any action, the ordinary practice of asking the people whom one proposes to exclude what exclusion does to them. The agent who refuses to do so may, by that refusal, close a relevant review pathway without closing all of them; whether and to what extent this is objectionable depends on the actual possibilities of access, understanding and response examined in Section 6. Considering the perspective of those affected is not the same as demanding a direct encounter with them.

7.3 At the stage of action

Protect and contain in the normal mode: When action has already begun, the protection of the victims and the containment of conduct may be indispensable. But its need and intensity depend on the situation, and the defeat of Nazism by a superior force does not prove that all unjust action can only be stopped by greater violence. The prescription of Cancio Meliá is correct: 'the appropriate answer, at the symbolic level, to the question of an essential rule must be the manifestation of normality, the denial of exceptionalism, that is, the reaction according to criteria of proportionality and attribution' (Jakobs & Cancio Meliá, 2007, p. 78). The British

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response - rapid arrest, common charges, common courts, confirmed sentences on appeal and punishment of offenders on both sides - was restraint in the normal way. The alternative, the exception mode containment, is unfair in itself by the criterion of section 2, and furthermore gives the cycle additional influence.

Responding to the act, not to the enemy: Criminal law appears at that moment as a possible institutional response, after the problem has arisen, and must not reproduce the exclusion to which it responds. The principle is that of the guaranteeist tradition, for which the legitimacy of the penalty lies within the limits that it observes - no penalty without crime, no crime without law, no conviction without evidence or defence - and for which criminal law protects the weaker party, who at one time is the victim and then the accused (Ferrajoli, 2002). The Zaffaroni rule is its application to the present problem: 'the only objective criterion for measuring the perilousness and harm of the offender can only be that of the perilousness and harm (real and concrete) of his own acts, that is, of his crimes, for which he must be tried' (Zaffaroni, 2011, p. 25); 'if crimes are committed, those responsible for them must be identified, arrested, prosecuted, tried, convicted and sentenced. This is what criminal law can do" (Zaffaroni, 2011, p. 185). The temptation at the moment is to treat the disorderly, insurgent or coup supporter as an enemy - to anticipate, aggravate, suspend guarantees - and thereby confirm for your group the understanding that the State is the persecutor. Whoever treated others as non-people should be responded to without being treated as non-people. It is not leniency; it is the criterion of Section 2 applied to the State's own action. Its justification does not rest on effectiveness. A response that observes the guarantees can still be reinterpreted by the agent's group as persecution - English criminal lawsuits were, and for that matter are no longer fair - and a response that violates them may occasionally not be exploited. Guarantees limit the injustice of the state response itself, even when they do not prevent its appropriation by prosecution narratives; the fairness of the response does not depend on its power to unravel the understanding of the aggressor, although a response that observes them gives that understanding less than it feeds on. Where criminal law goes beyond acts and reaches identities, as Cancio Meliá observes regarding the right of the enemy, 'the State does not talk to its citizens but threatens its enemies' (Jakobs & Cancio Meliá, 2007, p. 71), and 'the application of these types of offences has not prevented crime, but has contributed to attracting new militants to the organisations concerned' (Jakobs & Cancio Meliá, 2007, p. 73, n. 57).

Protecting the accountability of the source of influence: Capitol pardons and Brazilian dosimetry law show that return can operate through the very institutions of clemency and

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legislation. A pardon granted by the one who summoned the crowd, the crowd, converts the limit that the courts had upheld into a limit that depends on the approval of the group, whatever it may be. This raises an institutional problem which the argument derives from but does not solve, and which is here stated as a problem, not as a prescription that the philosophy of action could carry. If limits that do not depend on the consent of the agent are to exist, the power to lift them cannot rest entirely on those who were the object or beneficiaries of the acts to which the limits correspond - which suggests, as one direction among others, that clemency for crimes against the constitutional order may require a decision that those against whom the crimes were directed participate. Fraenkel's observation that 'jurisdiction over jurisdiction' decides everything (Fraenkel, 2017, p. 57) and the republican conception of freedom as non-domination, whereby an arbitrary power of interference makes those subject to it, whether exercised or not, unfree (Pettit, 1997), provide the basis; the author's book sets out the structural point: 'The promise never to close the gate belongs to the use of the structure; it does not change the structure that remains available' (Dietrich, 2026, ch. 17). But any such rule is an extensive constitutional proposal, with its own problems of definition - which crimes, which majors, which beneficiaries - and enforcement, and the entanglement protects whoever writes it: a regime that had pursued it itself could use such a rule to shield its own accusations. Symmetry (a rule adopted before any case and applicable to any offender) and the preservation of judicial review of convictions themselves are necessary safeguards, and do not solve all these problems. The point that the argument can make is narrower: wherever the lifting of a limit is decided by those whose influence produced the acts, the second outcome of the return - institutional reward - is present by construction, and the institution must know that this is what it is doing.

Preserving the possibility of revision within the answer: Containment without revision leaves the understanding intact. The Brazilian agreements with confession, the regrets recorded at the US sentencing hearings and the Community reparation in Southport are each instances of a response that leaves the agent room to review. The first step of resistance in Zimbardo - the ability to say "I made a mistake" openly, which "reduces the need to justify or rationalize our mistakes and thereby continue to support bad or immoral actions" (Zimbardo, 2007, p. 452) - is the description of what the answer needs to make possible. Restorative encounters with affected people, in particular, can restore the closeness whose loss Bauman identifies as a condition of cruelty: "moral inhibitions do not act at a distance. They are inextricably tied to human proximity" (Bauman, 1998, ch. 7). But proximity is not contact, and contact is not, by itself, correction. Intergroup contact research is accurate on that. Proportions and proximity "are

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necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for social contact" (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011, p. 179); living in the same city, crossing the street or disputing the same resources does not produce the experience that corrects a hostile representation. What contact changes, when it changes, is achieved less by knowledge than by affection: in Pettigrew and Tropp's meta-analysis, knowledge about the other group averaged about five percent of the impact of contact on bias, while reduction of anxiety and empathy averaged about thirty percent each, so "empathy and reduction of anxiety remain much more important than knowledge" (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011, pp. 83–84). This converges with section 3.3 and Bandura's finding that moral engagement is restored when one "returns humanity" to the other (Bandura, 2016, p. 94): a person can learn the facts about asylum seekers and continue to feel each encounter as a threat. The conditions proposed by Allport - equality of status, common objectives, cooperation, institutional support - are 'facilitative, not necessary' (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011, p. 68), but their absence matters where contact is involuntary and superficial, which is when negative contact raises the most prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011, pp. 190, 194). Two additional limits need to be stated. Contact can lead members of a disadvantaged group to see the majority as more just and to reduce their support for change - what Pettigrew and Tropp call the Reicher effect (2011, pp. 173–175) - and here the criterion of section 2 is indispensable: reducing hostility is not, in itself, overcoming injustice, and an intervention can produce a more peaceful coexistence while remaining a position of subordination. And the encounter should not transfer to the affected person the task of transforming the affected person; successful change, as Pettigrew and Tropp note, "also requires some weakening of the power of the favoured and some recognition, by the favoured, of the injustice and illegitimacy" of the situation (2011, p. 175). The restorative meeting is therefore a possibility conditioned by its quality, its safety and its organisation, not the most direct path to anything. The criminological basis for preferring such a response is John Braithwaite's (1989) distinction between the shame it stigmatizes and the shame it reintroduces: a response that condemns the act by keeping the agent's return to the community open, maintains Braithwaite, reduces recurrence, while one that expels the agent confirms the identity in whose name he acted. Staub's account of what it takes to abandon a violent course fulfills what reintegration has to offer: "separation from old companions; confronting or reformulating sacred values; finding new vision, meaning and purpose in life; developing skills that make a new way of life possible; and reconnecting to a community" (Staub, 2011, p. 367). Where understanding provided belonging, meaning and recognition, an answer that provided none of them leaves the agent with the group as the only community. The distinction is the practical

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form of the rule that the agent is responded to without being treated as an enemy, and indicates why the stigmatizing punishment offers the return of the cycle more than to feed than the reintegrator - indication, not guarantee, since section 3.5 showed that a fair response can also be recodified as persecution.

7.4 The future, with a qualification

Throughout the course, the normative axis was the due consideration of the other as a participant in a shared condition. This consideration extends to those who are not yet present, but not in the way that future invocations usually assume. It is pursued in the name of a better tomorrow as readily as in the name of a threatened today; "save our nation" was the slogan in Brasilia. The author's normative work rejects the case for establishing duties on the dependence of persons who do not yet exist: "It is not the future existence of persons that projects the duty forward; it is the continuity of the present condition that prolongs the direction of the action itself for the future" (Dietrich, 2026, ch. 15). The future that binds is the future of the shared condition that the present participants live in, and is achieved without destroying what they depend on. It is not a title for someone who speaks for the unborn against the living. Care for the future, in the sense that the thesis demands, remains linked to consideration for the other, and never to the survival or victory of the group itself.

8. Conclusion

An understanding can make an injustice acceptable to the perpetrator without altering the injustice of what has been done. Influences participate in the formation of this understanding; the action it authorizes can return as a new influence, as a narrative that reaffirms it, as an institutional reward or, where evidence shows it, as a strengthening of the understanding of certain actors; these returns are possible avenues by which the process can be sustained or reinforced. The three episodes examined show the structure in three different records - the protection of children, the defense of a constitution, the salvation of a nation - and they also show that in each one, the interruption that resisted came from outside the agent's circle: from courts that judged acts and not enemies, from officials who refused to certify a lie, from commanders who did not sign.

The question raised at the outset was how people come to understand an unjust harm as a moral duty, and under what conditions the process can be stopped. The answer has three parts.

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They come to this by an understanding whose three contents - the facts, what is due, what is allowed - have deviated in characteristic ways, under influences that have offered consistency and a target and rewarded the response; and the understanding, once formed, can go on to select the sources it admits, by the belonging it confers and by the justification of the agent's own actions, and to reinterpret conflicting information as confirmation of the perceived threat. The process can be faced at any time, and there are reasons to combine protection, containment and openness to revision: containment alone interrupts an action without transforming the understanding that authorized it, and review alone, where it depends on the same source that produced the error, can be undo by that source. And the limit must be of a kind that does not depend on the approval of the agent or his group - a criterion of justice by which the other remains a participant to whom consideration is due, even when perceived as an adversary, and even when the effects of the action reach people who are not yet present.

What follows is a program, not a lament. At the moment of influence, the institutions authorized to speak must fill the void, amplification must be denied to what has proved false within the limits that make the measure proportionate, and the few who shape the understanding of many must answer for it. At the time of the understanding, the three contents must be reached separately and the operation in progress in each justification must be identified, the collective attribution must be tested on who did what, the error must become admissible without requiring a full guilty plea, the reason for the correction must be brought by sources that the agent can still hear, and the victims must be heard as a condition of the trial. At the time of action, containment must proceed in the manner of normality, responding to acts and never to enemies, every response must leave the agent room to say that it was wrong, and the institutions that raise boundaries must know when the lifting is itself a reward to those whose influence produced the acts. None of this requires a good image of society. It requires only the recognition, accessible to everyone, that the person who is about to hurt himself lives in the same conditions as he lives, and that no good invoked is served by the destruction of the same for which the response is due.

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