

**Political Morality and the Problem of Dirty Hands:  
A Philosophical Critique and Re-interpretation.**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## Abstract

This thesis articulates a new account of political morality by developing a novel critique of the standard dirty hands (DH) thesis and a new interpretation of DH. Taking its cue from Machiavelli the DH thesis postulates that the possibility of harmony between morality and politics is unsatisfactorily idealistic. This thesis endorses Machiavelli's contention, but argues that the DH thesis misconstrues Machiavelli's insights: it fails to live up to its capacity to capture the complexity of political ethics and collapses into the idealism it seeks to evade. The DH thesis is inadequately 'static': it conceives the conflict between morality and politics as a momentary paradox of action - an anomaly disrupting the normality of harmony. As such it misconceives both the *extent* and the *nature* of the rupture between morality and politics. For, Machiavelli does not say that one must merely 'learn how not to *act* well'. Machiavelli is clear that 'one must learn how not to *be* good'. By exploring this discrepancy, I demonstrate that the DH thesis' overemphasis on action ignores the way moral character enters and jeopardizes politics. I then develop a dynamic account that captures DH in all its complexity. The key insight of that account is that approaching political ethics entails conceiving *politics as a practice and a way of life*. In short, DH involves a conflict between two incompatible ways of life, each with its own virtues and standards of excellence. Hence, the dynamic account captures a more crucial paradox, *the paradox of character*: virtuous politicians should become partially vicious and no longer innocent. The thesis then argues that the dynamic account has crucial implications for contemporary politics: democratic politicians operate in a context of perpetual conflict and dependence which renders the cultivation and exhibition of certain moral vices, including hypocrisy and compromise, necessary.

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# 1. Towards a New Political Morality: The Dynamic Account of Dirty Hands

*A dog starv'd at his Master's Gate, Predicts the ruin of the State  
A Horse misus'd upon the Road, Calls to Heaven for Human  
blood. The wanton Boy that kills the Fly, Shall feel the Spider's  
enmity.*

W. Blake<sup>1</sup>

*Many have imagined republics and principalities that have never  
been seen or known to exist in truth; for it is so far from how one  
lives to how one should live that he who lets go of what is done for  
what should be done learns his ruin rather than his preservation  
... Hence it is necessary to a prince, if he wants to maintain  
himself, to learn to be able not to be good, and to use this and not  
use it according to necessity.*

N. Machiavelli<sup>2</sup>

## 1.1. Introduction

A number of philosophers and public pundits have recently suggested that there is a moral crisis in contemporary political life which calls for the re-conceptualization of political morality - that is, the morality of professional politicians. At the core of this narrative of crisis lies the conviction that moral goodness and innocence have been eroded by conflict, vice and outrageous acts of wrongdoing. On this account, the re-conceptualization of political morality is inexorably intertwined with a deeply hopeful quest - the rediscovery of something lost: namely, the notion of ordinary moral goodness and innocence as an integral aspect of political morality. This hopeful way of thinking about political morality has been challenged by a prominent strand of political thought: the dirty hands (DH) perspective. Taking their cue from Niccolo Machiavelli's infamous remark in the title quote, contemporary DH theorists plant a question mark on the possibility of

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<sup>1</sup> *Auguries of Innocence*, 136

<sup>2</sup> *The Prince*, 61

harmony between ordinary morality and politics. In other words, the belief that ordinary morality and politics can and should be harmonized constitutes an unsatisfactorily idealistic delusion: it deforms our messy and fragmented morality and fails to do justice to the complex realities of politics. In this thesis I endorse Machiavelli's central contention, but I argue that the orthodox interpretation of DH has misconstrued Machiavelli's point and that, consequently, it is nothing more than a thinly veiled version of the idealism it purports to reject<sup>3</sup>. So, this thesis seeks to articulate a new perspective on political morality by developing a novel critique of the standard DH literature and a new, dynamic interpretation of DH which attempts to capture the problem in all its complexity and thereby restore Machiavelli's lost insights. In this introductory chapter, I endeavour to: a) delineate the central problem animating my inquiry; b) provide an overview of the argument and; c) offer an account of some of the key resources and methodology I shall deploy.

## **1. 2. An Ethical Crisis: The Yearning for a New Political Morality**

There is a prevalent perception of a growing ethical crisis in contemporary political life. Most philosophers and public pundits seem to agree that at the core of our contemporary problems lies a deepening moral crisis (c.f. Kuhner, 2008; Elliot, 2012; Rushworth, 2009; Nayar, 2009; Cliffe et al, 2000; Vernon, 2010; Pullman, 2010; Sandel, 2009; 2010; Judt, 2010). As argued, the outrageous acts of torture in Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib that followed the equally outrageous events of 9/11 reveal this much<sup>4</sup>. So do the expenses and sex scandals that frequently hit the headlines as well as the recent hypocrisies

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this thesis I shall use the terms 'conventional', 'standard', and 'traditional' DH thesis as synonymous to the orthodox way of thinking about the problem which is, as I explain later on, mostly owed to Michael Walzer (1973).

<sup>4</sup> For a documentation of the events of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay see Adams et al (2006), Strasser (2004) and The Human Rights Watch (2004).

and seemingly dodgy compromises of our public officials<sup>5</sup>. “Something has gone horribly wrong in Britain”, Peter Osborne writes. Condemning the events that surrounded the London riots and the hypocrisy of Britain’s politicians, Osborne argues that British politics is in a state of “moral decay” and in need of “a moral reformation” (2011: 1). Unless we restore a sense of political morality, Osborne maintains, we shall not prevent our politics from being further eroded by hypocrisy, ruthlessness and indecency.

The moral emptiness of contemporary politics was also a central theme of a recent pamphlet published by Madeleine Bunting, Adam Lent and Mark Vernon:

In a poll for the World Economic Forum ... two thirds of people across ten G20 countries believed that the economic recession had been caused by a crisis of ethics and values .... The financial crisis has been compounded in the UK by the MPs’ expenses scandals which has badly damaged trust in the political system ... The poll finding suggests that there is still a widespread public expectation that those in positions of political and economic power should demonstrate integrity ... This is what the crisis is really about ... ‘This is wrong’ has long ceased to have validity as a political statement ... Values [have] become a form of spin (Bunting, 2010: 5).

These remarks are united by a sense of despair at the state of our contemporary politics. Most commentators are quick to point out that moral goodness and innocence have been eroded by vice, conflict and outrageous acts of wrongdoing. But, this despair is paradoxically accompanied by a sense of faith: most of these philosophers and public pundits are also quick to add that we live in an era of great hope (Sandel, 2010; Vernon,

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<sup>5</sup> There are, to be sure, numerous examples of hypocrisy and compromise in politics and, in light of the account of DH I shall articulate in this thesis, this is hardly surprising. What I specifically have in mind here however, is the mismatch between Barak Obama’s and Nick Clegg’s pre-election promises and post-election achievements which I discuss in more detail in chapters 6 and 7.

2010; Pullman, 2010; Bunting, 2010). The extent to which this hope is warranted though, is partially intertwined with our capacity to rediscover and rehabilitate political morality. As Rowan Williams puts it, we must rescue the concept of virtue and “the idea of public life as a possible vocation for the morally serious person” (2010a: 4). We must, as he similarly emphasizes elsewhere, rediscover the conditions of “how to live as if we were human” (Williams, 2010b: 9).

What emerges from these remarks then is a yearning for a new political morality. As I have gestured in the introduction of this chapter, the overarching aim of this thesis is to develop an account of political morality by: i) advancing a novel critique of the contemporary and standard way of thinking about the DH problem and; ii) developing a new, dynamic interpretation of this problem in politics. Before elaborating on how this thesis adds value to the current literature of DH, it might be worth saying a bit more on two issues which I have touched on in the introduction of this chapter but merit more emphasis. First, when I use the term political morality in this thesis, I shall primarily refer to the morality of politicians. In other words, my focus here is the practitioner of politics in general and the practitioner of politics in our contemporary democratic societies in particular. And, as I shall explain, approaching the question of political morality and DH in the context of contemporary societies inevitably entails clarifying the character, virtues, agency and integrity necessary to lead and sustain a virtuous life of politics. Second, this narrative of moral crisis is sparked by a fairly standard way of thinking about political morality: it is typically assumed that a virtuous life of politics is (and can be) perfectly congruent with an admirable moral life. In the following section, I want to briefly outline this common way of thinking about political morality that emerges from this narrative of crisis. For, as I shall demonstrate in this thesis, it is this hopeful view which the standard DH thesis criticizes as unsatisfactorily idealistic but ultimately collapses into. And, it is this view of political morality which the new account of DH I endeavour to develop here rejects as utopian and dangerous.

### 1.3. The Standard Solution: Moral Goodness, Innocence and Perfection

Lurking in the background of the narrative of crisis in contemporary politics is a popular way of reflecting on political morality. On this account, our politics is presently a dirty and unsavoury business: moral goodness has been eroded by vice, conflict and outrageous acts of moral wrongdoing. But it need not (and should not) be like that. The fact that practitioners of politics are dirty or that our politics has appealed to nefarious characters does not entail that it is impossible to clean up political life *per se*. This catharsis however, is conditioned on injecting ordinary moral demands into politics or on attracting good persons into this domain. In this sense, the rehabilitation of political ethics involves the rediscovery of something lost: namely, the notion of ordinary moral goodness as an integral aspect of political virtue.

So, what emerges from this prevalent way of thinking about political morality is this: public agents must, to echo Rowan Williams' (2010c: 1) pithy words, escape from the abyss of immorality. This insight, Philip Pullman additionally tells us, is made abundantly clear in Williams Blake's poem *The Auguries of Innocence*, which I have cited in the title quote. "At first sight", Pullman tells us, "vice is more attractive. She is sexier, she promises to be a better company than her plain sister virtue" (2010: 1). However, Blake's message is that, moral vice and the thrill to virtue must be overcome (Pullman, 2010; Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*). For, as Pullman maintains, "the public [or the political] and the private [or the moral] are one" (2010: 1). On this account, it does not really matter what our specific subject is: the virtuous public or political agent turns out to be no different from the good-hearted moral or innocent private agent. To put it differently, political morality is congruent with ordinary morality. Moral innocence and goodness constitute a necessary ingredient which "will enable a nation" and its politicians "to live well ... morally well" (Pullman, 2010: 1).

On the face of it, this seems a reasonable way of reflecting on political morality. “Ask most people what ethics means”, Lent says, “and they will almost certainly reply that it is about obeying the rules or being good” (2010: 57). In short, this way of reflecting on political morality involves a quest for an ‘ideal theory’<sup>6</sup>. Philosophy, according to ideal theorists, should involve a quest to conceive and revive the perfect society or the Diogenic individual - “the perfect specimen of humanity, without defect or blemish, lacking nothing that contributes to the ideal person and the ideal life” (Hampshire, 1987: 140). It is imperative, according to John Rawls (who first coined the term ideal theory), to start with this vision: “the reason for beginning with an ideal theory” is that it provides “the only basis for the grasp of these more pressing problems” and “the urgent matters that we are faced with in everyday life” (1971: 9). So the general point of an ideal theory is to present to us a conception of the perfectly moral society or individual life that public agents are to lead and act upon. In essence, an ideal theory (regardless of its specific content) postulates that individual or societal ethics can be understood in a unified and harmonious way that allows for the possibility of perfection. So, on the one hand, when it comes to individual political morality, it is thought that the dispositions, virtues and actions political or public agents should exhibit can be perfectly congruent with those which characterize a moral or a purely private individual. On the other hand, when it comes to societal life, it is believed possible

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<sup>6</sup> This characterization of ideal theory is primarily borrowed from John Kekes (2011). Whilst some philosophers may disagree with the extent to which his characterization coincides with Rawls’, the importance of perfection (which becomes plausible via the discovery of universal principles of justice) is also touched by the latter. In *The Theory of Justice*, Rawls writes that “the principles of justice that result [from the ideal theory] are those defining a *perfectly* just society [and] we arrive at a certain ideal conception” (1971: 351). For the relationship between ideal theory and perfectionism and harmony see also Charles Blattberg (2013), Michael Slote (2011) and Stuart Hampshire (1987; 1989). I shall say more on Rawls’ ideal theory and how his conception of societal perfection and harmony feeds into a conception of the perfect individual in chapter 7.

to discover certain substantive values and interests that are universal and mutually shared across different agents.

Whilst the term ideal theory is relatively recent, the effort behind it is neither novel nor uncommon. As John Kekes tells us:

Thinkers working within all the major religious traditions have offered versions of it; among philosophers, Plato, the Stoics, the Epicureans, Augustine, Aquinas, Spinoza, Leibniz, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and most recently Rawls, have attempted it; and contemporary “neos” - neo-Thomists, neo-Kantians, neo-consequentialists, neo-Marxists, neo-existentialists, neo-contractarians - are still at it (2011: 9).

What underpins the claims I have outlined above is a crucial assumption which a large portion of philosophers and public pundits have almost unquestioningly inherited from Plato: a romantic nostalgia for unity. Put differently, since Plato and Socrates, ideal theorists have assumed that our ethical and societal problems are neither perfectly insurmountable nor rationally irresolvable. Herein emerges the key conceptual ingredient of ideal theories, what Isaiah Berlin (1990) terms the Platonic Ideal or, what we might alternatively term, following Stuart Hampshire (1987), the doctrine of moral harmony. In short, this ideal puts forward the seductive assumption of value monism: the contention that “all truly good things are linked to one another in a single, perfect whole; or, at the very least cannot be incompatible” and “that the realization of the pattern formed by them is the one true end of all rational activity, both public and private” (Berlin, 1969: x). So, according to this ideal, there must exist an underlying harmony in all human values, virtues and across all spheres of value or ways of life. Conflicts among them are, if not mere chimeras, mathematical puzzles begging for an ultimate and perfect rational solution - that is, a solution without a remainder of any sort.

A crucial by-product of this line of thinking then, is that individual and societal conflict is a disease - a pathology of social and moral thought, something that can and should be overcome (c.f. Hampshire, 1989; 1996; 2000; Berlin, 1969; 1971; 1981; 1990; Williams, 1972; 1981; 1990; Kalimtzis, 2000; Edyvane, 2007; 2008; 2011; 2013). In this sense, imperfection, conflict, vice and acts of wrongdoing are intrinsic neither to individual (political) morality nor to the polis. Their roots can always be traced to avoidable and irrational human mistakes. True, very few of our politicians might ever achieve this, ideal theorists would say. Political agents may be too irrational and sinful to ever become morally good or perfectly virtuous. The obstacles to perfection and harmony in individual and societal political morality can be numerous- our despair and outrage may well ensue. But it is our own irrational lapses and imprudence that are to be blamed. For, this vision *must* be philosophically conceivable - at least in theory, this vision must be true. Or, so it is believed.

#### **1.4. The Dynamic Account of Dirty Hands**

The novel account of political morality I endeavour to develop in this thesis is closely aligned to Machiavelli's political philosophy and seeks to challenge this optimistic way of thinking about political morality. I want to suggest that the moralistic vision of political life which emerges from the deeply hopeful vision of perfection and harmony - either in individual political ethics or in the political community - is wrongheaded. The contention that private or ordinary moral virtue constitutes the basis for political virtue is an innocent fairy-tale and a dangerous illusion: it displaces the complex realities of politics and mischaracterizes the lives politicians lead. To put it simply, philosophers have expended too much - and ultimately forlorn - energy on trying to harmonize ordinary morality and politics. In this thesis, I shall suggest that a fundamental re-orientation in the way we approach politics is required: if we want to make sense of political ethics we should, to use Bernard Williams' (2002a: 3) words, give more autonomy to "distinctively political thought": we should take conflict, pluralism and the messy realities of politics more

seriously. Making sense of political ethics then, requires us to turn our attention not to ordinary moral virtue but to moral vice. For, as I shall argue, the cultivation and exhibition of certain ordinary vices is inextricably intertwined with what it means to lead a virtuous life of politics.

To be clear, the argument I wish to advance in this thesis is not that the vices merely constitute an inescapable but nonetheless unfortunate characteristic of politics. Rather, I want to suggest that the vices constitute political virtues. In short, the vices are conducive to the sustainment of a virtuous political life: they aid practitioners of politics to satisfy some of the ends of their practice. In this sense, it is not our present political arrangements, or the character of those currently operating within politics, that are at fault *per se*. If that were the accusation, then ideal theorists would simply respond that the proposed solution for our current ethical malaise is still philosophically conceivable and not necessarily rationally unachievable; all we need to do is to create those moral circumstances and sanitize political life: we must lure morally good, innocent and rational individuals into political life. The argument I wish to advance here though, is far more disquieting: the aspiration for perfection and harmony in individual and societal political ethics is *philosophically* unwarranted and practically impossible. The fault with aspirations of this sort is conceptual, not just empirical.

More importantly, the argument I will develop is not merely intended to upset monism or the project of ideal theorists. Rather, this argument constitutes part of the novel critique I shall advance against the contemporary DH literature and the new, dynamic interpretation of DH I endeavour to develop. To clarify this point, it might be worth saying a few words about the account of political ethics I intend to articulate and how it differs from

the standard vogue of this perspective which is mostly owed to Michael Walzer's seminal essay *Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands*<sup>7</sup> (1973).

On the face of it, the standard DH thesis sits neatly with the argument I wish to advance in this thesis. This is partly because of the purported lineage the orthodox version of this problem is *committed to* as well as a certain idealistic and value-monist vision which the standard DH thesis is *committed against*. To cut a long story short, contemporary DH theorists trace the insights of their account to Machiavelli's notorious lesson in *The Prince*: that an expedient and responsible politics requires its practitioners "to learn how not to be good" (XV: 57; Walzer, 1973: 164). "Machiavelli", Walzer emphasizes, "is the first man, to state the paradox that I am examining" (1973: 175). And this paradox, he adds, flies in the face of a vision shared by our most influential moral frameworks on offer: it plants a question mark "not only to the coherence and harmony of the moral universe, but also to the relative ease or difficulty-or impossibility-of living a moral life" (Walzer, 1973: 161). At the core of the standard DH thesis lies the postulation that in certain momentous and tragic circumstances, an innocent and morally perfect course of action is impossible: the action guiding prescriptions of morality (which are thought to be deontological) and the demands of successful political action (which are taken to be consequentialist) conflict. Thus, politicians are required both from a normative and prudential perspective to do or tolerate

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<sup>7</sup> Whilst the standard account of DH is predominantly Walzerian in terms of its conceptual structure, it is not embraced only by Walzer. Rather, it is also embraced by more contemporary DH theorists such as Steve de Wijze (1994; 1996; 2002; 2005; 2009), Michael Stocker (1990; 2000), Suzanne Dovi (2005), Christopher Gowans (1990; 2001), Kenneth Winston (1994) and Anthony Cunningham (1992). In addition, this way of approaching the problem of DH is embraced by critics of the DH thesis. See for instance the account of Kai Nielsen (1996; 2000). However, I should also note here that I do not claim that all philosophers who we may label as DH theorists embrace this way of thinking about DH. As I shall explain, the accounts of Stuart Hampshire, Bernard Williams, Martin Hollis, Richard Bellamy and Sue Mendus for instance are in numerous respects very different from the standard DH thesis. I shall say more on this in due course.

things which are morally unacceptable and which carry a moral remainder. For instance, successful political action may require politicians to lie, cheat and even sacrifice the lives of innocent civilians. The core claim of the standard DH thesis then is that it takes conflict and the complexity of political ethics seriously; it acknowledges that morality and politics are uneasy bedfellows. In Steve de Wijze's words:

A DH analysis [in political philosophy] provides a more plausible characterization of our moral reality ... The existence of genuine moral conflict, the incommensurability of cherished values, the conflicting personal and role-based moral claims, give rise to moral conflict situations where those who strive to act morally unavoidably get DH (2009: 309).

The affinity between the standard DH thesis and Machiavelli's political thought has been taken for granted (c.f. Nielsen, 1996; 2000; Ramsay, 2000a; Shugarman, 2000a; 2000b; Coady, 1993; 2008; Gowans, 2001; Stocker, 1990; de Wijze, 2005; de Wijze & Goodwin, 2009; Primoratz, 2007; Philp, 2001; Spicer, 2010; Taylor, 2012). But in this thesis I wish to question the extent to which the standard DH thesis takes Machiavelli's insights seriously. To be clear, the argument I seek to advance here does not merely involve an exercise in the history of political thought. Rather, I want to suggest that the standard DH thesis, by virtue of its failure to take Machiavelli's insights seriously, fails to live up to its capacity to capture the complexity of political ethics and collapses into the idealism it seeks to evade. In particular, I shall argue that the standard DH thesis is inadequately 'static': it conceives the conflict between morality and politics as a single and stark *paradox of action* - a mere tragic anomaly which disrupts the normality of past and future harmony. Consequently, the orthodox way of thinking about DH in politics misconceives *the extent* of the rupture between morality and politics: Machiavelli's vision is supplanted by an unsatisfactory vision of honesty, innocence and harmony. But it also misconceives *the nature of such a conflict*. For, Machiavelli does not say that one must merely 'learn how not to *act well*'. Machiavelli

is clear that ‘one must learn how not to *be* good’. By exploring this discrepancy, I shall illustrate that the standard DH thesis’ overemphasis on action fails to capture the way moral character - in particular, innocence as a disposition - enters and jeopardizes politics.

I have stated these claims baldly, and the full extent of my critique of the standard DH thesis will be developed in the subsequent chapters. What I merely wish to do here is to briefly outline some of the problems permeating standard DH approaches and emphasize the way the account of DH I endeavour to develop: i) differs from the orthodox conception of DH and ii) attempts to correct these problems. So, at the core of the dynamic account of DH I wish to develop in the thesis, lies the postulation that approaching political morality and the problem of DH in politics requires us to conceive political life as *a whole*. We are, in other words, required to approach *politics as a practice* and *a way of life*. And, this involves approaching politics, though not entirely, on its own terms: by considering the dispositions, virtues, agency and integrity of those aspiring to lead a virtuous political life. In short, the standards of political conduct arise from within politics as opposed to any external moral standpoint. Simply put, conceiving politics in terms of abstract and universal *action-guiding* rules and principles as deontologists, consequentialists and standard DH theorists do, is neither philosophically astute nor conducive to the concrete realities and requirements of politics. Instead, we should shift our attention to qualities of character, dispositions and habits necessary for participating in politics and meeting its demands and ends.

Thus, conceiving politics as a practice requires us to consider more carefully the virtues (or the moral vices) that contribute to a virtuous political life. It also requires us to conceive politics *in dynamic* or *narrative terms*. For, political life is not ‘static’ and we cannot adequately capture what it means to have DH by merely conceiving it as a momentary and dramatic paradox of action. In other words, the key problem with the static DH thesis is that it displaces and misrepresents the political virtues. And this problem, as I shall argue in chapter 5, can also be explained with reference to the fact that standard DH

theorists have inherited the tendency of post-Enlightenment ideal theories to ground morality on abstract action-guiding rules. A crucial consequence of this is that the standard DH thesis cannot account for the recognition that the conflict between morality and politics is perpetual and cuts much deeper than a mere *incompatibility of action-guiding prescriptions*: it also involves a conflict between (at least) *two incompatible ways of life* each with its own virtues. Put another way, I want to show that the problem of DH in politics does not merely involve *a paradox of action* (or even a continuous series of these): it also involves *a paradox of character*. It is this neglected recognition, I shall argue, which constitutes the essence of Machiavelli's message: leading a political life is fundamentally incongruent with leading an admirable moral life. In short, the prevalent static account of DH - by virtue of its very nature - cannot adequately capture what leading a virtuous life of politics entails: it ignores that politics constitutes an on-going activity and an entire way of life, with its own distinct political virtues or ordinary moral vices. Conducive to a virtuous life of politics is the cultivation and continuous exhibition of certain ordinary moral vices. To put it differently, in the absence of a dynamic approach to political ethics and DH, we cannot adequately capture certain distinct virtues which hold together a virtuous life of politics and constitute the essence of political integrity.

An additional but nonetheless related feature of the account of DH I wish to develop, is the recognition that politics is a much more internally complex and grubby domain of activity than most philosophers in general and standard DH theorists in particular recognize. This recognition follows my general point that an adequate account of political ethics and DH must draw on the resources of politics itself. So, in the spirit of Machiavelli, I shall suggest that conflict is not manifested only with respect to individual morality - between an admirable moral life and a life of politics. Rather, the rupture between a moral and political life is partially conditioned on the recognition that conflict is also manifested externally: between different political agents or groups, each of which has incompatible aspirations and interests. In short, politicians are not self-sufficient: they operate in a domain

of perpetual conflict and dependence. Knowledge and experience of how to manoeuvre in such a messy context is a crucial characteristic of a virtuous politician; it constitutes an integral feature of political integrity. In this sense, conflicting loyalties, antipathies, sleazy handshakes, treacheries, hypocritical dissimulation and, in certain instances, even cruelty cannot be eliminated from the practice of politics as moralists (and even standard DH theorists) like to assume. The general point here is that the account of DH I wish to develop in this thesis attempts to take the complexity of politics and the context in which politicians operate more seriously. In so doing, the dynamic account of DH considers more carefully what is peculiar about politics: it provides us with a better grasp of certain ends and concepts which are distinctive of politics as a practice, the peculiarity of political relationships and the centrality of power, contestation and conflict to this activity.

So, by developing a dynamic account of DH, I hope to shed new light on the way which we should approach the problem of DH in politics. For, by rejecting the orthodox interpretation of this problem as unsatisfactorily idealistic and static, I endeavour to help us better understand *what it really means to have DH in politics*. To put it differently, the dynamic account of DH constitutes an attempt to capture this problem in all its complexity and restore Machiavelli's insights which have been long lost from the standard DH thesis. In connection to this, I should add that the argument I shall advance here reveals that there exists a neglected rift in the tradition of DH. Whilst most contemporary discussions of DH typically follow and build on Walzer's analysis (c.f. de Wijze, 1994; 2002; 2005; 2009; de Wijze & Goodwin, 2009; Stocker, 1990; Gowans, 2001; van Fraassen, 1990; Dovi, 2005; Cunningham, 1992) without questioning its adequacy or the extent to which it sufficiently captures Machiavelli's insights on political ethics, conflict and pluralism it does not follow that all philosophers who we may label DH theorists subscribe to this unsatisfactorily 'static' and idealistic way of thinking about the problem. For, as I shall illustrate in this thesis, in contrast to the account of political morality and DH presented by standard DH theorists, political theorists who can be labelled as DH theorists (such as Stuart Hampshire,

Bernard Williams, Sue Mendus, Martin Hollis, and Richard Bellamy for instance) have a different, more nuanced and interesting understanding of DH - one which takes Machiavelli's insights on political morality, conflict and pluralism much more seriously.

But, I also hope that the dynamic account of DH shall illuminate the enterprise of political philosophy in general. To be more specific, the argument I endeavour to develop here shall help us better understand *what the crisis we are confronted with is really about*. For, the narrative of crisis and the standard DH thesis are conceptually similar in at least two respects each of which is fuelled by an idealistic account of political morality. The first, relates to the time-span of the crisis: what emerges from the narrative of crisis is the sense that the crisis we are confronted with is a rather novel and fairly uncommon phenomenon. In short, most discussions of moral crisis in contemporary politics convey the picture that we are confronted with a 'static' problem: we live in a society which is ridden with vice, disintegration and conflict and that it is *only* in our politics where these features tend to be observed. Differently put, whatever the precise timeline of the unravelling of this crisis there once existed an era in which moral and political virtue were harmonized. And, the way forward is to retrieve the notion of ordinary moral goodness which once constituted an integral aspect of political virtue. Second, what emerges from the typical cries of despair as well as from a considerable portion of works on moral and political philosophy is the sense that the crisis we are confronted with is, in its nature and character, a *political crisis*. What underpins this assumption is the very idealistic way of approaching political morality I have outlined above.

The dynamic account I shall develop in the thesis suggests that the sense of the crisis is misdirected. For, the aspiration to cleanse politics, popular even amongst proponents of the standard DH thesis, constitutes part of the problem. To be clear, I do not wish to deny that some of the scandals that periodically hit the headlines are uncongenial to a virtuous politics. Nor do I wish to suggest that we do not have any political and social

problems *at all*. What the dynamic account of DH suggests though, is that the crisis we are confronted with is far from ‘static’. Nor is it a political crisis *per se*. It is not ‘static’ because politics and morality can be harmonized neither in theory nor in a practice. The vision that there once existed a paradise lost where our politics was conducted by angels or saints constitutes a historically unfounded and dangerous exaggeration. This point also challenges the second conceptual feature of the narrative of crisis: we mistakenly think that the crisis we are confronted with is political precisely because we have an unsatisfactorily moralistic understanding of what political morality presupposes in the first place. Simply put, our crisis is primarily philosophical: it relates to the concepts we employ, and with the virtues, actions, structure and context we presuppose when we contemplate political ethics. This point is glimpsed by Isaiah Berlin, who expresses the doubts I share and which, as I shall demonstrate, also extend to the standard way of thinking about the problem of DH in politics: “Can it be,” he asks, “that the basic assumptions are themselves somewhere at fault? ... Can it be that Socrates and the creators of the central Western tradition in ethics and politics who followed him have been mistaken, for more than two millennia?” (1969: 154).

So what I want to suggest in this thesis is this: we do misconceive political morality and the problem of DH in politics and that, by correcting this misconception, it becomes easier to render philosophical reflection on pressing political issues intelligible. Hence, whilst I would not go as far as to stipulate that there are no ethical problems in contemporary politics, I contend that the deeper sense of despair and hope that often accompanies the narrative of crisis should be rejected. So should the prevalent and moralistic way of reflecting on political morality and DH. Or, so I shall argue.

## 1.5. Plan of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into eight chapters, including this introduction. In general terms, the main purpose of the first half of the thesis (Chapters 2, 3 and 4) is to outline and criticize the account of political morality that emerges from the standard DH thesis, whilst the second half of the thesis (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) seeks to introduce and defend a more nuanced account of political morality that restores Machiavelli's lost insights and captures DH in all its complexity.

So, in the next chapter (Chapter 2), I wish to elaborate on some of the considerations I have introduced in this chapter. In particular, I wish to consider a fairly standard account of political morality. In so doing, I wish to reconstruct a perspective which seems to sit well with the abovementioned moralistic way of reflecting on political morality and which has been subjected to severe criticism by standard DH theorists: what I shall call 'the view of innocence' or of 'clean hands'. In exploring this perspective, I shall provide a schematic sketch of two of our most influential ideal moral theories on offer: Kantianism and Utilitarianism. To be clear, it is not my intention to provide a comprehensive treatment of such theories. Rather, since this thesis wishes to contribute primarily to the debate about DH, the task I wish to undertake is more modest: I want to identify a position standard DH theorists have targeted and elucidate certain features which underpin it. As I explain, at the core of this perspective lies a version of the Platonic ideal: the contention that moral and political action can be harmonized as long as we ensure that political actions accord with certain overarching and universal moral principles: the Categorical Imperative or the Principle of Utility. This perspective, as I shall show, puts forward the ideal of a certain type of innocence and moral perfection - that is, *innocence as the absence of moral guilt or culpability* or *moral perfection in action*. In other words, moral perfection or innocence is attainable if our actions are morally right *tout court*.

In Chapter 3, I shall consider the DH thesis as a plausible alternative account of political morality. Even though the DH tradition is a complex one, I will focus on the more present and conventional vogue of the DH thesis, which is mostly owed to Walzer (1973; 1977). First, I will examine the way in which the standard DH thesis conceptualizes and frames the problem of DH. Second, I shall consider the specific implications the DH problem, as traditionally conceived, poses for the subject matter of the thesis, *vis-à-vis* the view of innocence. In contrast to the unified view of our moral reality advanced by the view of innocence, the standard DH thesis purports to take Machiavelli's insights on politics, conflict and the realities of political action seriously. It captures a more nuanced, complex, and disunited aspect of morality: at the core of the standard DH thesis lies the recognition that in certain tragic circumstances, political agents may be confronted with a paradox of action. The upshot of this is that innocence in politics, though desirable, is fragile and far from guaranteed. The existence of plural values stemming from the disunity between ordinary or private and political or public morality, may, in certain momentous scenarios conflict and give rise to the phenomenon of inescapable moral wrongdoing: actions that are politically justified but at the same time somehow morally wrong. Finally, I want to register a lingering doubt as to whether the standard DH thesis is ultimately that different from the idealistic vision it purports to upset.

In Chapter 4, I develop my critique of the standard DH thesis in more detail. In short, my general argument is this: there are still problems with the standard DH thesis; it fails to live up to its purported capability to capture the complexity of politics. The general point I wish to advance in this chapter is that we need to reconsider *what it means to have DH* in relation to certain on-going activities, most notably politics. To be sure, I do not wish to deny that (some of) the insights of the standard DH thesis better capture the fragmentation of our moral reality. But, at the same time, it is precisely because these insights - the Machiavellian recognition that politics and morality are difficult to harmonize - are more sophisticated *vis-à-vis* those of the view of innocence that the general point I

wish to pursue in this chapter is so striking: that the standard DH thesis and the view of innocence collapse into a similar idealistic position. In advancing this claim, I shall question the extent to which the orthodox DH thesis takes Machiavelli's insights seriously enough. In particular, I suggest that the account of political ethics that emerges from the standard DH thesis is overly 'static' and, unsatisfactorily serene: it mischaracterizes the *nature* and *extent* of the rupture between morality and politics. In short, the conflict between morality and politics is much more enduring and cuts much deeper than static accounts allow. As I demonstrate, the orthodox conception of DH as a single and stark choice which brings about the unbearable, but momentary, loss of innocence does not suffice: the problem of DH - if situated in the real context of certain on-going activities (most notably politics) - is much more enduring and perverse than static accounts allow. It also has certain dimensions that are misrepresented by standard DH frameworks. In addition, I suggest that the politician standard DH theorists present us with, may not be as good for politics as they maintain. In advancing this claim, I argue that conceptualizing DH as a paradox of action is not enough: it neglects how moral character - in particular innocence as a disposition - enters and jeopardizes politics. For, innocence as a disposition can bring about political disaster without necessarily one being confronted with a paradox of action; and it may persist even after one's hands have been dirtied in the traditional way.

In Chapter 5, I begin to set out a richer and more nuanced account of political ethics and DH. In so doing, I wish to turn to a tradition which underpins Machiavelli's conception of politics and agency but which remains elusive for proponents of the standard DH thesis: virtue ethics. This tradition, I contend, enables us to develop a framework that grasps DH in all its complexity: it enables us to approach political life, with its distinct virtues, dispositions and standards of excellence as a whole. In this sense, a turn to virtue ethics shall enable us to fill the lacuna left open by Machiavelli, and to effectively retrieve elements that have been long lost from the DH perspective. Now, whilst most accounts of virtue ethics (both contemporary as well as classic) are underpinned by certain assumptions

which I endeavour to resist in the thesis - namely, the Platonic Ideal or the doctrine of final rational harmony - I shall suggest that Alasdair MacIntyre's neo-Aristotelian framework in *After Virtue*, resists these and can thus serve as a theoretical premise upon which we can develop a more sophisticated account of DH. In particular, I shall illustrate that MacIntyre's negative account - his concerns surrounding the status of contemporary philosophy - reaffirm my scepticism on, and add new insights to, the inadequacy of standard DH analyses. More importantly however, I shall utilize elements of MacIntyre's positive thesis to break away from the contemporary 'static' conception of DH - its interpretation as a single tragic episode - in relation to certain on-going practices. By integrating elements of MacIntyre's framework with Machiavelli's conception of politics and political virtue (*virtù*) then, I wish to provide the foundations for the development of a 'dynamic' account of DH. In developing a dynamic account of DH, I conceive politics as a practice and way of life, and draw on Machiavelli's discussion of political agency and *virtù* in order to sketch some of the virtues conducive to virtuous political conduct. As I demonstrate, the richer DH perspective which emerges acknowledges that virtuous engagement in politics, requires one to become partially vicious and partially virtuous, yet no longer perfectly virtuous or morally innocent (dynamic DH). That is to say, the problem of DH, understood in dynamic terms, involves a *paradox of character*, not just a *paradox of action*: leading a virtuous political life requires one to *become* partially vicious and no longer innocent.

Having outlined the basic conceptual structure of the dynamic account of DH, in Chapter 6 I proceed to argue that the paradox of character is not merely of an abstract, historical interest. In short, the general points I wish to advance in this chapter are these: i) the paradox I identified in the previous two chapters, constitutes a real and inescapable issue for democratic politics today; ii) liberal democratic societies are somehow implicated in promoting and exacerbating the vices (or at least some manifestations of them). To put it differently, democratic politicians operate in a context which renders the cultivation and continuous exhibition of some of the vices necessary. I develop this argument by turning my

attention to the explicit examination of the vices - and, in particular, to a vice I touch on in chapters 4 and 5: hypocrisy. To be more specific, I draw on Machiavelli's insights on political relationships and project these onto the context of liberal democratic politics. In so doing, I wish to explore in more detail an insight I briefly gesture at in chapters 4 and 5 and which constitutes a crucial feature of the dynamic account of DH: the suggestion that hypocrisy is not merely a 'lesser vice' (or a political virtue). It also constitutes a necessary and valuable by-product of contemporary politics and the glue that holds together a virtuous life of politics in such a context. Finally, I argue that attempts, popular amongst political moralists, to find an escape route from hypocrisy are an innocent and perilous delusion: the more one tries to unmask hypocrisy and extirpate oneself from its practice the more hypocritical, unfit for and dangerous to democratic life one becomes.

But, as I shall explain, the account of hypocrisy and dynamic DH in contemporary politics I present in chapter 6 is bound to be incomplete without acknowledging the necessity and value of compromise. And, in the absence of such recognition, we cannot fully capture the distinctive nature of political integrity either. So, my general aim in Chapter 7 is this: I want to argue that compromise is necessary and inescapable in contemporary public life and that acknowledging this helps us make better sense of political integrity. To be more specific, I shall suggest that: i) compromise is an ambiguous and fox-like public virtue - something which is politically expedient but not necessarily morally admirable; ii) a willingness to compromise, whilst uncongenial to moral integrity, constitutes an essential part of the integrity of democratic politicians. As I shall argue, attempts to deny the desirability of this phenomenon in politics misconstrue the messy context in which politicians operate. They also mischaracterize the nature of political integrity. In doing so, I shall build on the argument I advance in chapters 5 and 6: that making sense of political ethics and DH also entails taking the context in which politicians operate seriously. In this sense, the incongruence between a moral and political life is partially conditioned on the recognition that conflict is also manifested externally: between different political agents or groups. Politicians

are not self-sufficient: they operate in a domain of conflict and dependence which affects the virtues conducive to virtuous political practice. And it is precisely this recognition which renders compromise an inescapable feature of ordinary politics and a crucial aspect of political integrity. For, whilst commitment to a set of principles which stem from one's tradition or pre-election promises implies a commitment to seeing them realized, the practice of politics in conditions of interdependence, pluralism and conflict often requires compromising and partially abandoning those principles. An innocent and all-or-nothing pursuit of one's principles in politics is bound to promote abstract cruelty - and thereby jeopardize order and stability - or lead to defeat: a rigid refusal to compromise one's principles would mean the entire abandonment of any hope of seeing them realized.

In the final chapter of the thesis (Chapter 8), I shall bring together the most crucial threads of the dynamic account of DH. In particular, I want to outline why such an account matters - not just by virtue of its capacity to make us rethink what *it really means to have DH in politics* but also in terms of its capacity to make us reconsider *what it means to lead a virtuous life of politics* in the context of contemporary liberal democratic societies. Simply put, by bringing together the core insights of the dynamic account of DH, I want to delineate: i) not only the contribution of this account to the literature of DH in particular but also ii) how this account illuminates the enterprise of political philosophy in general. In so doing, I shall revisit the problem I registered in the introduction of the thesis: the prevalent perception of a moral crisis in contemporary political life. I suggest that, whilst the insights of the dynamic account might appear to be *prima facie* bleak and pessimistic, this is only because we have unrealistic expectations on what political morality involves in the first place. In short, the nature of the crisis we are confronted with is not political but philosophical: it relates to the concepts we employ and certain assumptions which we have unquestioningly inherited from Plato and the Enlightenment project.

## 1.6. Research Methodology and Method

This PhD thesis, like similar works of moral and political philosophy will utilize secondary sources. I shall generally use standard philosophical tools of conceptual analysis and the scrutiny of arguments so as to develop my own distinct account of political ethics and DH. To be more specific, since the dynamic account of DH I articulate here shall challenge the prevalent way of thinking about political morality and DH as unsatisfactorily idealistic and utopian, this thesis can be seen as residing in the tradition of ‘political realism’ (c.f. Williams, 2002a; Galston, 2010; Horton, 2009). In the spirit of Niccolo Machiavelli, one of the forefathers of this tradition, contemporary political realists suggest that harmony and perfection propounded by most philosophers do not represent ideals of political life achievable under even the most favorable circumstances (c.f. Hampshire, 1989; 1993; Williams, 1978; 2002a; Gray, 2000; Galston, 2010; Shklar, 1984; 1989; Bellamy, 2010; Philp, 2001). This point is nicely raised by Hilary Putnam in his *Realism with a Human Face*: “when a philosopher ‘solves’ an ethical problem for one, one feels as if one had asked for a subway token and been given a passenger ticket valid for the first interplanetary passenger-carrying spaceship instead” (1990: 179). In a similar vein, Bonnie Honig points to a “mysterious phenomenon” in political philosophy: “the displacement of politics” (Honig, 1993: 2). Philosophers writing from diverse positions, Honig (1993) tells us, erroneously converge in their assumption that philosophical success lies in the elimination of conflict. Philosophical analyses of this sort, she maintains, are barely satisfactory, let alone political: they are devoid of any real world political experience. In short, the general argument I wish to advance in this thesis echoes the realist point that an obsession with harmony, monism and perfection ends up displacing the realities of politics. Or, in reverse, that an adequate account of political ethics and, as I shall argue, DH must draw on the resources and complex realities of politics itself.

Moreover, in order to provide substance to my arguments and make them more explicit, I shall use various real life examples, both contemporary and historical. Needless to say, this approach dovetails with political realism well. For, as indicated, political realists since Machiavelli (*The Prince; Discourses on Livy*) have long emphasized the importance of taking the realities of politics and the lessons of history seriously (or, at least, more seriously than most moral and political philosophy has tended to do). As Raymond Geuss aptly remarks:

Political philosophy must be realist. That means, roughly speaking, that it must start from and be concerned in the first instance not with how people ought ideally (or ought “rationally”) to act, what they ought to desire, or value, the kind of people they ought to be etc. (2008: 9).

Or, as Glen Newey similarly puts it:

To say that political philosophy should address the nature of political practice is not to condemn the discipline to unambitious descriptivism. It is, however, to engage with the phenomena of politics as they are. One role for political philosophy is precisely to expose ... habits of thought [which] pervade both academic and lay thinking about [politics] (2001: 28).

In this sense then, the use of real life examples can fruitfully aid my enterprise to provide a more realistic and nuanced account of political ethics and DH. Moreover, drawing on our contemporary and historical experience shall assist my endeavour to expose the idealistic vision of political morality, prevalent amongst the heirs of Plato and the Enlightenment in general and proponents of the standard DH thesis in particular. To be clear, I do not wish to suggest that the account of political morality put forward by standard DH theorists is idealistic *because* they do not use real-life examples. For, it is not the case that proponents of the orthodox DH thesis fail to draw on contemporary and historical experience (c.f. Walzer, 1977; de Wijze, 2009). Rather, what is at stake here is standard DH theorists’ *idealistic in-*

*terpretation* of the various case studies they employ. And this, as I shall demonstrate, is owed to deeper philosophical problems which permeate their account.

In addition to the utilization of real life examples, the thesis also appeals to works of fiction and, in particular, literature and poetry. Now, I should acknowledge here that, this particular choice of methodology might seem peculiar. Whilst there are numerous objections against the use of literature as a philosophical tool, I want to emphasize two which, as John Horton and Andrea Baumeister (2003: 9) rightly acknowledge, “have been the two most recurrent objections of philosophers to the use of imaginative literature” and are of particular relevance to my enterprise. The first, which is in its essence epistemological, postulates that works of literature are, by their very nature, fictitious and cannot provide insights relevant to the real world. The second intertwined objection pushes this claim a bit further: the insights of literature are not merely irrelevant to the real world - they are also likely to equip us with a misleading and harmful picture of ethical and political life. What both these objections suggest then, is that this particular choice of methodology hardly dovetails with my endeavour to provide a more realistic and nuanced account of political morality and DH. Put another way, it seems counterintuitive for a thesis that purports to follow the tradition of political realism to draw on works of fiction.

This, however, is not the case. To be clear, I do not wish to suggest that drawing on works of literature constitutes the only way of doing political philosophy. I only wish to suggest that the conviction that works of literature and poetry merit no place in moral and political philosophy (let alone in a philosophy that purports to be realistic) is a misconception. What is worth adding to this is that the above objections to the use of literature are far from novel: they can be traced in the political and moral philosophy of Plato and Socrates. In *The Republic*, Plato acknowledges the existence of an “old quarrel between (what Plato takes to be) philosophy and poetry” (667c). For Plato this quarrel is easily settled: neither literature and poetry nor comedy and tragedy are philosophically and politically acceptable

or relevant. These works cannot be plausibly seen as providing any fruitful insights to philosophical reflection and ethical knowledge: “it is phantoms (*phantasmata*) not realities they produce” (*The Republic*, 99a). Nor do they merit a place in his ideal city: “so much of poetry as is hymns to gods or celebration of good men should be admitted into a city” (*The Republic*, 607a). Part of the reason as to why Plato views the works of Homer, Pindar and the tragedians as an affront to philosophy and to individual and societal ethics though, stems from the fact that such works grapple with issues he strenuously seeks to evade: messiness, conflict, tragedy, vice, dependence and imperfection (c.f. *The Republic*, Book III). In short, Plato’s contention that literature and poetry mischaracterize ethical reality and are thus unacceptable is preconditioned on a very specific set of philosophical convictions which, as I shall argue in the thesis also permeate the standard DH thesis and which, are utopian<sup>8</sup>: a love for wholeness, harmony and perfection. This is perhaps the appropriate place to add that, it is not a surprise that a host of political philosophers who have long insisted on the importance of taking the complexity of politics and morality seriously (i.e. Stuart Hampshire, Bernard Williams, Alasdair MacIntyre, Isaiah Berlin, Hannah Arendt, Peter Johnson, Martin Hollis, Sue Mendus and Judith Shklar amongst others) and which this thesis shall follow have borrowed insights from works of fiction. As these theorists would have put it, because literature more often dwells on the particular and the unique it is capable of providing us with a more complex, nuanced and realistic picture of our ethical cosmos.

Some of these points as well as the general value of using literature as a means to aid philosophical reflection have been recently emphasized by a number of moral and political philosophers (c.f. Murdoch, 1956; Adamson et al, 1998; Antonaccio, 2000; Nussbaum,

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<sup>8</sup> A similar point concerning the relationship between Plato’s account of individual morality (or his account of the soul) and his account of the ideal city is advanced by Hampshire (1989; 1993) and Edyvane (2008). As they argue, whilst Plato presents his ideal city as analogous to an ideal soul, his account of the latter is premised on a very specific set of political and philosophical convictions. These, they maintain, stem from an already formed picture of his ideal Republic.

1990; 2007; Williams, 2007; George, 2005; Cunningham, 2005; Horton & Baumeister, 2003). The marriage of literature and philosophy, these theorists suggest, can provide a richer conception of political philosophy as it takes us to places that are very difficult for us to visit. In Anthony Cunningham's words:

By drawing our attention to morally salient features of life and character, novels can sharpen our ability to perceive moral subtleties ... By taking literature seriously as a philosophical resource, we do not supplant philosophy. Rather, a marriage of literature and traditional philosophical reflection opens the door to a richer conception of ... philosophy that can speak to the heart of what matters in human life (2005: 131).

Hence, the use of literary examples can reinforce the key aims of the thesis in two interconnected ways. First, it shall provide me with a crucial leverage to take seriously the complexity and messiness of our ethical and political cosmos, the inevitability of conflict and the necessity of certain ordinary moral vices in political life. To put it differently, the use of literature can fruitfully aid my endeavour to upset the hygienically pallid way of reflecting on political morality and DH. Moreover, it shall also help my enterprise to provide a more realistic and nuanced account of political ethics and DH - one which is sensitive to the peculiarities of politics as a practice and way of life as well as the complexity of the domain in which political practitioners operate.

The second way in which the utilization of novels can aid the key aims of the thesis is glimpsed in Geoffrey Harpham's pithy observation that "those who gravitate towards narrative gravitate away from Kant. They see, in short, narrative as a way of rescuing ethics from Kant" (1992: 159). Whilst challenging Kantian ethics is not my main concern in the thesis (though some of the issues I discuss naturally apply to Kant and his followers), Harpham's remark can be also extended to the standard DH thesis. Again, I should emphasize here that I do not wish to suggest that standard DH theorists do not utilize literary examples.

For, this is not the case - orthodox analyses of the DH problem are replete with literary examples and allusions to poetry and drama (c.f. Stocker, 1990; 2000; de Wijze, 1994; de Wijze & Goodwin, 2009; Gowans, 1990; 2001; Walzer, 1973). But the way standard DH theorists use such examples almost contradicts the point of utilizing novels. For, novels typically present us with complex, detailed and thick descriptions of the interior life of fictional characters embroiled in the messy business of politics and living. To utilize novels and *at the same time* frame the problem of DH in 'static' terms is to ignore that the character of each novel has a certain history, is situated within a certain context and is characterized by certain dispositions which may be conducive or catastrophic to a virtuous political life. In other words, the use of novels dovetails with my endeavour to upset the prevalent 'static' formulation of this problem. By implication, it shall also aid my attempt to conceive the problem of DH in dynamic or narrative terms. In this sense, the use of narrative shall help me illustrate that we ought to approach political life as a whole - that leading a political life is not merely a matter of acting but also a matter of character, virtue and disposition. Therefore, the use of literary characters and examples can reinforce my view of political agency, virtue and integrity.

## 2. The View of Innocence

*Doing everything that is morally right  
And nothing that is morally wrong would  
be a tremendous accomplishment.*

E. Connee<sup>9</sup>

*Hygiene ... turns out to be an excellent route.  
As we know it, dirt is essentially disorder ...  
Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative  
movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment.*

M. Douglas<sup>10</sup>

### 2.1. Introduction

We live in a period characterized by a restless impatience with politics. With a few exceptions, politicians do not enjoy a good press, either among philosophers or the wider public. Amidst the recent MPs' expenses scandals as well as widespread acts of political deception and violence, it seems hard to deny at least this much: there is a dire need to re-conceptualise political morality. As I have gestured in the previous chapter, most contemporary commentators suggest that we need to re-inject ordinary moral considerations into political life: as Madeleine Bunting puts it, the phrase "this is wrong has long ceased to have validity as a political statement ... Values [have] become a form of spin" (2010: 5). On this account, the reconceptualization of political morality is intertwined with the rediscovery of something lost: namely, the notion of ordinary moral goodness and innocence as an integral aspect of political morality.

This familiar and optimistic way of reflecting on political morality seems to sit well with a perspective which has been severely criticized by proponents of the standard DH thesis and which we may describe as the view of innocence or of clean hands (c.f. Walzer,

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<sup>9</sup> *The Nature and Impossibility of Moral Perfection*, 815

<sup>10</sup> *Purity and Danger*, 3

1973; Gowans, 1990; 2001; Klockars, 1980; de Wijze, 1994; 1996; 2002; 2006; 2009; Blattberg, 2013; Stocker, 1990; 2000; Cunningham, 1992). As I shall explain in chapter 3, the standard DH thesis suggests that the view of innocence constitutes an unsatisfactorily idealistic account of political morality. Its hopeful insights fail to capture the recognition that, in certain tragic circumstances, public officials may face a *paradox of action*: they may be compelled for political reasons to do or tolerate things that are immoral and thereby lose their innocence. My general aim in this chapter is to reconstruct this hopeful perspective on political morality. In other words, since the key point of the thesis is to contribute to the debate about the problem of DH, in this chapter I want to show where the orthodox way of thinking about DH comes from. In so doing, I wish to clarify a view which the standard DH thesis is committed against: a perceived moral ‘innocence’ in traditional philosophy.

The discussion is organized into three sections. In the first section, I shall provide a preliminary outline of the view of innocence so as to set the context for the subsequent discussion. I suggest that innocence, at least as understood here (and by proponents of the standard DH thesis), refers to a particular version of moral perfection: that is, moral perfection *in action*. Simply put, innocence refers to the absence of moral guilt or culpability. In short, moral perfection is thought to be attainable *iff* our actions are morally right *tout court*. In the second section, I focus on two prevalent (and rival) ideal moral theories which, according to proponents of the standard DH thesis, constitute the most notable adherents of this view: Kantianism and Utilitarianism. In so doing, I shall provide a brief outline of both such theories and the respective version of innocence which emerges from each of them. In the third section, I shall discuss in more detail a core feature which underpins the view of innocence: The Non-Remainders Thesis. This feature, as I explain, constitutes a version of the vision which, as I gestured in chapter 1, looms in the background of ideal moral frameworks since antiquity: what Isaiah Berlin (1990; 1990a; 1990b; 1990c) and Stuart Hampshire (1987; 1989) term the Platonic Ideal or the doctrine of final rational harmony respectively. For, their differences aside, both theories I discuss here are said to be in agreement in

at least this much: perfect goodness and innocence are not just plausible in contemporary public life. They are also mandatory. The upshot of this, as I explain, is that morality and politics are far from incongruent. All our public agents have to do is to ensure that their actions accord with certain overarching and universal moral principles: the Categorical Imperative or the Principle of Utility. I shall conclude by registering a *prima facie* doubt as to whether the view of innocence and its underlying presuppositions are adequate.

Before proceeding any further though, I should emphasize an important limitation of scope. The accounts of Kantianism and Utilitarianism provided here are highly schematic. It is not my purpose to provide a comprehensive treatment of either theory, nor do I mean to suggest that no version of them could evade the critique of DH theorists. Rather, the task I wish to undertake here is far more modest: I want to identify a position that proponents of the standard DH thesis have targeted and elucidate certain features which underpin it.

## **2.2. Moral Perfection and Innocence: A Preliminary Consideration**

According to an anecdote about Wittgenstein, Fania Pascal - following the philosopher's confession of his vices - sarcastically exclaimed: "What is it? You want to be perfect?" Wittgenstein bitterly responded: "Of course I want to be perfect" (Monk, 1990: 368-369). This story is often taken to illustrate the unrealistic nature of Wittgenstein's aspirations - the extent to which his moral expectations far exceeded the requirements of morality. Much the same intuition underlies the *cliché* 'Nobody is perfect' said in light of an act of moral wrongdoing - the speaker is insinuating that moral imperfection is, to some extent, inevitable. "Outside the context of moral discussion", Susan Wolf says, the difficulty of perfection may strike some of us "as an obvious point". However, "within that context, the point *if it be granted* will be granted with some discomfort. For, within that context, it is generally assumed that one ought to be as morally good as possible" (1982: 419, my emphasis).

A recent exposition of this vision is found in Colin McGinn's *Must I be Morally Perfect*. McGinn (1992) is adamant that it is not the case that Wittgenstein's aspirations were incongruent with morality; moral perfection is not a supererogatory goal: "it is part of morality to require each of us to be perfect: to fall short of moral perfection is to be bad in a quotidian sense" (McGinn, 1992: 33). To cut a long story short, McGinn's vision of moral perfection can be summarily formulated in the following dictum: an agent is morally perfect, if and only if, he never does what is wrong. For McGinn, this dictum seems to be self-evidently correct - "an obvious truth" to use his words (McGinn, 1992: 33). Its validity aside though, this dictum appears to be simple enough: it supplies "the necessary and sufficient conditions for moral perfection *in action*" (McGinn, 1992: 33; my emphasis). So are its demands: on each occasion, we ought to act in a *tout court* morally right manner. What acting in a *tout court* morally right manner specifically involves, McGinn does not, nevertheless, say. Addressing this issue, proponents of the standard DH thesis tell us, compels us to turn to our dominant moral theories (which, as we shall see in due course, advance contrasting visions of how moral perfection is attained). What it is important to emphasize for now however, is that such a dictum, even in this generic formulation, seems to be intertwined with (at least) two interconnected notions (which are also gestured by McGinn). A brief comment on these might aid us to flesh out some crucial assumptions which underpin this view.

The first - and most extravagant perhaps - is that of sainthood. As Susan Wolf puts it, a moral saint is "a person who is as morally worthy as he can be", a person "whose every action is as morally as good as possible" (1982: 419). Second, moral perfection is attainable *iff* one's actions are not marked by any form of moral wrongdoing. This notion of perfection, signifies - and is conditional upon - a particular notion of innocence which is neither uncommon nor unfamiliar to us: it often finds contemporary expression in liberal jurisprudence (Johnson, 1993; Fletcher, 2000). As Peter Johnson highlights:

In liberal jurisprudence innocence means the absence of guilt ... innocence is lost when a particular guilt is present. The establishment of guilt is dependent on the existence of a set of legal rules which enable the identification of agents and the actions, which ... they are guilty of performing. To be innocent in this sense is to be not guilty of that with which you are charged. This means that the agent does not deserve punishment or forgiveness (1993:7).

Consider too the invocation of such a notion in Just War Theory: innocence serves as the foundation for the important (and sometimes unnerving) distinction between combatants and non-combatants, which both censures and permits certain forms of warfare (c.f. Orend, 2008). As Michael Walzer emphasizes in *Just and Unjust Wars*, soldiers must use their weapons to target *only* those “engaged in harm” (1977: 82). Soldiers must discriminate between civilians, those who are not engaged in warfare, and legitimate military targets, directly involved in intentional attacks. In short, the moral prohibition on warfare policies which would otherwise endanger the lives of civilians depends on our acceptance of the notion that non-combatants are innocent: that they are free from guilt and military involvement against us.

So, liberal jurisprudence and Just War Theory frame innocence in light of a framework of legal rules, against the background of past conduct and as bearing a close connection with the ideas of responsibility and blameworthiness. So does moral philosophy it would seem (or, at least, McGinn - though, as I shall suggest following DH theorists in due course, so do our two prevalent moral theories). “Surely”, says McGinn, if one “always conforms his actions to certain moral norms, there can be no room left for moral imperfection to creep in” (1992: 33 - 34). In this sense, innocence and perfection (as understood and criticized by proponents of the standard DH thesis) is conditioned upon the moral status of our actions: if these conform to certain moral laws there is, as argued, no reason to suppose that such an ideal is unattainable. In short, such an ideal bears a distinctively ‘passive’ flavour

(Johnson, 1993; Slote, 1983): one is morally perfect and innocent merely because one has not done something morally wrongful.

What such an optimistic account of political morality generally entails then, is the image of moral hygiene, simplicity, holiness and righteousness. It is precisely these elements which deem this view *prima facie* attractive. For, the antithesis between the image conveyed by this account of political morality and our contemporary societies is so stark that is hard to miss: “holiness and impurity”, to use Mary Douglas’ words, “are at opposite poles” (1984: 7). And it is for this reason, she maintains, that “sacred things and places are to be protected from defilement” (Douglas, 1984: 7). Insofar as we place some value on the moral status of our actions, it is (at least for most us) not easy to disagree with the claim that dirt and immorality constitute an affront to what is pure. Nor can we dispute the widely held intuition that our public agents must strive to do what is morally right. Or, so it would seem. The recent egregious acts of wrongdoing, spanning from the alleged sex scandals and abuses of power - the one involving Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the former chief of IMF comes to mind here (Buettner, 2012; Carvajal & de la Baume, 2012) - to acts of public violence - the astonishing physical assault from a member of the Greek neo-Nazi party against two left-wing politicians is a notable example (Smith, 2012) - seem to render this intuition even more profound. “Of all moral conditions”, Elizabeth Wolgast tells us, “innocence seems easily the best and most desirable”. For “against the background of guilt and traffic with wrong, innocence is indisputably better, just as something clean is better than something soiled, something fresh better than something stale” (1993: 297). Innocence - the absence of moral wrongdoing- its proponents suggest, appears to be an excellent route and a magnificent achievement. But it also constitutes an extremely reassuring vision: if “moral perfection is not so extreme and impossible a requirement” McGinn says “the divine comes within our reach” (1992: 33).

Of course, the question one might well want to ask here is this: But is moral perfection and innocence possible? I reserve that question for the next chapter, in which I shall provide an outline of the standard DH thesis. As I show, adherents of the standard DH thesis raise pessimistic insights surrounding the possibility of innocence and perfection (especially) in politics. What I want to emphasize here though, is that the view of innocence rests on three general and interrelated preconditions, which already loom large. First, regardless of its precise content, this view seems to be underpinned by the assumption that a stark and fine line can (and should) be *always* drawn between acts that are morally rightful *vis-à-vis* those which are morally wrongful. Otherwise, one has reasons to wonder whether innocence is indeed practically attainable. Second, if moral perfection is not “an extreme and impossible” requirement, as McGinn (1992: 33) contends, it must be *ipso facto* true that in *every* single case, a *tout court* morally right or innocent course of action - one that is entirely free from moral wrongdoing - should be available to the agent<sup>11</sup>. For, if instances where no course of action that is perfectly right exists, innocence seems to become less attainable, if not impossible. Finally, there must - somehow - exist a universal and overarching (set of) standard(s) or principle(s) by which we can judge whether our actions do conform to this ideal. If such a standard is not available, the contention that ‘one is perfect as long as one acts in a morally right manner’ loses much of its grip. Thus, the ideal of innocence requires this much: a set of fully consistent and overarching moral principles (or laws) through which we can determine what the right course of action in every specific case is - *ergo* the course of action that enables us to be perfect.

In connection to these preconditions, this is perhaps the appropriate place to highlight a crucial issue: the view proponents of the contemporary and standard DH thesis criticize, primarily concerns *innocence with respect to a deed* not *innocence with respect to character*. To put it differently, the type of moral innocence proponents of the standard DH

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<sup>11</sup> This point is also raised by Clark (1993), Connee (1994) and Calhoun (1995).

thesis criticize regards *innocence as it applies to actions*, not necessarily *innocence as it applies to persons*. To be sure, this distinction might appear superficial: innocence as it applies to a person is often seen as the absence of guilt and an inability to inflict harm<sup>12</sup> (Wolgast, 1993). But this is not always the case. For, as I shall demonstrate in chapter 4, there exists a crucial distinction between *innocence conceived as the absence of wrongdoing* and *innocence conceived as a disposition*. What is worth noting for now, is that the crucial difference between these two types of innocence is that innocence as a disposition directly relates to certain attitudes and virtues. More importantly, it signifies a lack of knowledge and experience of certain practices or ways of life. In this sense, whilst both types of innocence often serve to denote a certain level of moral purity and hygiene, it is not implausible for an individual to be guilty with respect to a particular deed but nonetheless retain his innocent character: innocence as a disposition implies an inability to be *intentionally* and *knowingly* guilty and vicious - it does not exempt one from guilt or vice. As Graham Greene in *The Quiet American* nicely puts it: “innocence [as a disposition] is like a dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world, meaning no harm” (1955: 29). Hence, in contrast to innocence as the absence of wrongdoing which bears a distinctively passive flavour, innocence as a disposition has a more active sense: it is often responsible for damage and political disaster. It is this crucial insight, as I argue in chapter 4, which cannot be accommodated by the standard DH thesis. In short, the standard DH thesis - by virtue of its overemphasis on action - fails to capture the way moral character enters and jeopardizes politics.

Irrespective of all this however, the view of innocence and perfection proponents of the standard DH thesis challenge is far from uncommon. Or, so standard DH theorists sug-

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12 A similar point is made by Michael Ignatieff (2004) with respect to the virtues of a religious life, which as I shall suggest in chapter 5 seem to be closely related to innocence as a disposition. Ignatieff seems to suggest that it cannot be the case that religion could, in any way, be associated with violence and the vice of cruelty. See also Christopher Gowans (2001).

gest<sup>13</sup> (c.f. Nagel, 1972; 1978; Walzer, 1973; de Wijze, 1994; 2002; 2009; Gowans, 1990, 2001; Stocker, 1990; Cunningham, 1992; van Fraassen, 1990). The attempt to extinguish immorality and moral wrongdoing from our lives has been a central pillar of our rich tradition of moral and political philosophy. In *Innocence Lost*, Christopher Gowans suggests that this view “is a recurrent theme in Western philosophical tradition”. For, “it often finds expression in religious faith and is frequently coupled with additional beliefs, or hopes, such as that our goodness will be rewarded in the end” (2001: 220). However, “the ideal that moral innocence may be achieved need not take religious form to have forceful hold upon us” (Gowans, 2001: 220). Rather, the main contemporary promulgators of innocence are Kantianism and Utilitarianism. For, it is these two theories which are explicitly committed to devising a set of criteria for determining the rightness or wrongness of actions and which have invited considerable criticism from proponents of the standard DH thesis (c.f. Gowans, 1990; 2001; Stocker, 1990; Walzer, 1973; Cunningham, 1992; de Wijze, 1994; 2006; 2009; de Wijze & Goodwin, 2009). As Stephen de Wijze puts it, “to argue for ... [the DH] phenomenon flies in the face of ... nearly all consequentialist and deontological moral theorists” (2009: 308). It is to these two ideal moral theories and their respective expositions of innocence I now turn.

### **2.3. Innocence, Moral Perfection and Ideal Moral Theory**

In Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dmitri Karamazov, before he is to be tried for murder, is visited by his brother to whom he expresses his last torment:

It’s God that’s worrying me. That’s the only thing that’s worrying me. What if he doesn’t exist? ... Then, if he doesn’t exist, man is the chief of the earth, of the universe. Magnificent! Only how is he to be good without God? That’s the question. I always come

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<sup>13</sup> This point is also made by proponents of moral dilemmas in general. See in particular John Gardner (2005; 2007) and Martha Nussbaum (2000; 2007).

back to that .... After all, what is goodness? ... Goodness is one thing with me, another with a Chinaman, so it's a relative thing. Or isn't it? Is it not relative? A treacherous question! You won't laugh if I tell you it's kept me awake two nights. I only wonder how people can live and think nothing about it (1950: 721).

Most moral and political philosophers share something like Dmitri's worry. Morality, they believe, must be grounded on something other than whether one happens to be Russian or British, member of this or that culture, society, clan or family, participant in this or that practice, wedded to one world view or way of life and so on. Whilst most philosophers may try to steer away from religion, they are in agreement that the touchstone of morality must be located in certain universally binding and overarching principles<sup>14</sup>. As Martin Benjamin puts it:

Ethical theorists have traditionally been drawn to the more abstract and general rather than to the more practical and immediate concerns of morality. They have sought a fully consistent, comprehensive set of values and principles that, when embraced by all, would eliminate rationally irresolvable (or incommensurable) moral conflict (1990: 75).

The contention that all moral conflicts must admit to a perfect solution is an important one. For, as I shall explain in due course, it is a version of this ancient conviction which also permeates the view of innocence DH theorists challenge as utopian in politics. What is worth reiterating here though, is a point I briefly acknowledged in chapter 1: the quest for discovering such universal principles constitutes, in essence, a quest for an 'ideal theory'. In short, most ideal theories constitute attempts to delineate the conditions of perfection under the aegis of reason and harmony: they provide us with a reasonably clear picture of what is

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<sup>14</sup> For a more detailed exposition of this belief, see for instance Isaiah Berlin (1990), John Kekes (2011) and Stuart Hampshire (1989).

morally and rationally right or just and so of what we should be striving for. As Charles Blattberg explains, most ideal theories are united under the assumption that:

Doing the right thing, and nothing but the right thing, is always possible as long as one follows a (correct) theory of morals or justice. This is because the unity of theory ensures that one will either never have to compromise a value or principle or that the wrongness of doing so can be cancelled out. Otherwise put, whenever an action complies with a unified vision of what is right, it should be considered ‘clean.’ (2013: 1).

At the core of this effort to devise the ideal scheme of human behaviour, proponents of the standard DH thesis tell us, lies the ‘covering law model’ of morality (Gowans, 2001). This model supposes that the sole concern of morality is to aid us determine and rationally justify conclusions of moral deliberation - those action- guiding judgements about what, in the final analysis, one *ought to do* in any situation<sup>15</sup>. The covering law model “requires the justification of these judgments to take the form of an inference from a first moral principle, as applied to the facts of the case” (Gowans, 2001: 119).

In short, the basic structure of moral deliberation consists in deriving and applying such principles to particular situations in order to determine what *ought to be done*. This model, John Kekes adds, assumes that “moral considerations have overriding importance in the evaluation of all actions, because all actions either conform to or violate the prescriptions of the ideal theory”. And since “the requirements of morality are universal” it automatically follows “that they apply to all actions” (Kekes, 2011: 9). It is such an understanding of morality - a universal and overarching formula - which sustains the view of innocence. For, in doing what ought to be done, there is nothing more to be said about this or that particular case - one is morally perfect and cannot be plausibly seen as bearing any moral blem-

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<sup>15</sup> The covering law model of morality also lurks in the background of the discussions of Michael Stocker (1990), Martha Nussbaum (2000; 2007), Michael Neu (2012), Steve de Wijze (1994; 1996) and Michael Walzer (1973).

ish<sup>16</sup>. And, as proponents of the standard DH thesis suggest, it is precisely this model which lies at the core of Kantianism and Consequentialism (c.f. de Wijze, 1994; 1996; 2002; 2009; Walzer, 1973; Stocker, 1990; Cunningham, 1992, Gowans, 1990; 2001). Each of the following two subsections is concerned with the consideration of these two ideal theories and the version of innocence which, according to standard DH theorists, emerges from them.

### *2.3.1. Innocence, Moral Perfection and Kantianism*

To say that the figure of Immanuel Kant has been influential in Western philosophy would be an understatement (c.f. Kagan, 2002; Schneewind, 2002; Baron, 2008). Kant's thought features prominently in contemporary discussions of the just society - the most notable example being John Rawls' (1971) *A Theory of Justice*. It also extends to questions of morality in various contexts, ranging from business ethics (c.f. Bowie, 1999; Smith & Dubink, 2011) to political morality in general (c.f. Roulier, 2008; Pallikkathayil, 2010) and to more specific discussions and condemnations of torture and public deception (c.f. Sussman, 2005; Harel & Sharon, 2008; Mayerfeld, 2008; Ramsay, 2011; Allhoff, 2012; Mahon, 2003; Cliffe et al, 2000). Of course, the term Kantian ethics is employed rather loosely: it often refers to an array of contemporary deontological theories that rely on Kant's ideas. However, for the purposes of the exercise I wish to conduct here - the reconstruction of the view of innocence in its Kantian variant - I shall restrict myself to the examination of Kant's key insights.

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<sup>16</sup> This view is often defended by invoking the ought-implies-can (OIC) principle and the principle of agglomeration. For the OIC principle, see Kekes (1984), Lemmon (1990), Nagel (1990), Stocker (1971), Gowans (2001) and Fischer (2003). For the agglomeration principle, see Hampshire (1951), Trigg (1971), Williams (1973b; 1990), Marcus (1980), van Fraassen (1990), Sinnott-Armstrong (1984, 1985; 1987a; 1987b) Stocker (1990) and McConnell (1978; 2010).

Now, the best place to commence locating the ideas of innocence and perfection in Kant's moral thought is *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. For, it is here where Kant's attempt to establish "the *supreme principle of morality*" - which if adhered to, renders our actions morally perfect - originated (2002: 8). From the outset of the *Groundwork*, Kant is adamant that the search for such a principle cannot be effective unless morality is "cleansed of everything empirical" (2002: 4- 5). Morality must be neither sought in the particular nature of any agent, nor in specific contingencies of the world. Reliance on empirical grounds distorts the quest for a 'universal practical philosophy'. It also hinders the possibility of perfection: it leads to "actions contrary to the (moral) law" and "to evil" (Kant, 2002: 6 - 28).

Kant's remarks suggest that his conception of morality possesses a strongly juridical flavour which already sits well with what proponents of the standard DH thesis term the covering law model: "morality", Kant says, "consists in the reference of all action to legislation" (2002: 52). It is in connection to this insight that the centrality of the notion of duty emerges in Kant's ethics<sup>17</sup>. Morality, according to Kant, is conditioned upon the fulfilment of our duties. In this sense, an action is morally laudatory and right *tout court*, when it conforms to duty. Hence the Kantian conception of moral perfection: one is morally perfect and innocent if one's actions do not involve a moral transgression - a violation of one's duties.

But our duties are pre-determined by the moral law - identifying the former, requires us to determine the nature of the latter. Since Kant contends that moral law must be purged of anything empirical, its ultimate source cannot be external: "legislation", he says, "is discoverable prior to and abstracted from experience" (Kant, 1990: 36). It is from our rational faculty - which, uncontaminated by empirical contingencies, forms a common in-

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<sup>17</sup> Hence the term 'deontological' (duty + logos) often employed to capture the Kantian philosophical tradition.

gradient across mankind - which we should derive the moral law<sup>18</sup>. By cleansing philosophy from anything (which Kant takes to be) extraneous, we are bound to arrive at the supreme principle of morality, expressed as a Categorical Imperative (CI):

Act only in accordance with that maxim (rules of action) through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law” (2002: 37; 1990: 40 - 41).

A moral law, Peter Johnson (1993) and Roy Holland (1980) explain, is categorical in (at least) three senses. First, it is unconditional and non-negotiable; it constitutes a necessary and sufficient condition for innocence and perfection. Because of this, Kant says, moral laws are expressed in the form of an *ought*. An example would be the statements: “You ought not to lie” and “You ought not to break a promise”. So, an imperative is categorical if it is impermissible for us to violate it: we cannot “take the liberty of making an exception for ourselves ... even only for this once” (Kant, 2002: 37). Second, a moral judgement is categorical in the sense of not requiring an external justification for itself<sup>19</sup>. An absolute imperative implies that there is nothing further to be said with regards to the second statement - its character forms a part of its meaning. In Kant’s words, “these laws, like mathematical postulates, are indemonstrable and yet apodictic” (1990: 40). Morality then, is like Euclidian mathematics: to ask why the angles of an isosceles triangle must be equal would imply that we have misunderstood what is being said, because that is what an isosceles triangle means. Thus, the CI “which declares the action for itself as objectively necessary without reference

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18 The reasons for this, Kant explains, are simple: not only do external circumstances lead us to immoral actions, but if moral laws are also universally binding it would be erroneous to derive them from specific practical circumstances. Instead, we must derive these from the “universal concept of a rational being” (Kant, 2002: 28). See also Schneewind (2002), Becker (1993) and Robert (2012).

19 Contrast the statement “This is a good chair” with “This is a good act”. The former may be explained by reference to its fulfilment of a function but the latter (say an act of truthfulness), does not require justification outside itself.

to any aim ... is valid as an *apodictically* practical principle” (Kant, 2002: 31). This brings us to the third sense in which imperatives are categorical: morality is not justified by reference to something beyond itself - it is not subsidiary to any further end. Rather, only something which constitutes an end in itself can form a ground of morality. Hence the second formulation of the CI:

Act so that you use humanity as much as your own person as in the person of every other, always at the same time as end and never merely as means (Kant, 2002:47).

Since rational beings are of absolute value (presumably because they are the only source of that which is good without qualification) they must be *always* treated as ends not merely as means<sup>20</sup>.

So, for Kant, our actions are innocent if they fulfil the following two ‘tests’ as prescribed by the CI: i) universalizability<sup>21</sup> and ii) respect for persons. From these tests we arrive at a more nuanced scheme of our duties which are divided into duties towards oneself, duties to others and perfect and imperfect duties (Kant, 2002: 37 - 43). As Becker (1993) and Robert (2012) explain, perfect duties are those to which one’s every action must conform: they entail actions which are permissible *and* necessary - or, in reverse, perfect duties entail absolute prohibitions against certain actions (i.e. breaking promises, stealing, murder and lying). Consider for instance lying. For Kant, the maxim to lie would embroil one in a practical contradiction - the principle ‘you ought to lie’ cannot be plausibly held as a universal principle or duty. Hence, “any exception to the duty of veracity nullifies the principle of

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<sup>20</sup> See Becker (1993), Feldman (1978), Rachels (2007) and Raphael (1990).

<sup>21</sup> This involves the following procedure: First, formulate a maxim that enshrines your reason for acting. Second, recast that maxim as a universal law governing all rational agents. Third, consider whether your maxim is conceivable in a world governed by this law. If it is, then ask whether you could rationally will to act on your maxim in this world. If you could, then your action is permissible (O’Neill, 1975, 1989; Robert, 2012).

universality” (Kant, 1949: 350). More importantly, the liar exploits humanity: he treats others as mere means and wrongs humanity in the most essential point of duty. In so doing, the liar also wrongs himself: “one renounces one’s personality and, as a liar, manifests oneself as a mere deceptive appearance of a human being, not as a genuine human being” (Kant, 1990: 9). So the duty to be truthful is perfect and unconditional. In contrast, imperfect duties are those which one must adopt, but one need not always act upon: actions stemming from imperfect duties are morally permissible, but not strictly laudatory<sup>22</sup>.

If we are to bring the basic elements of Kant’s moral thought together, the main thesis which emerges is this: it is our duty as human beings to elevate ourselves to an ideal of perfection - the idea of a human being whose actions satisfy the requirements of duty, as prescribed by the CI. In so doing, our will is absolutely good - this is a will which “cannot do evil, hence whose maxim, if it is made into a universal law, can never conflict with itself” (Kant, 2002: 55). Hence, the CI purportedly forms “the single condition” under which conflict is eliminated: in a rational and absolutely good will, “all maxims ought to harmonize from one’s own legislation into a possible realm of ends” (Kant, 2002: 54- 55). This thesis gives rise to three interlinked implications of Kant’s thought that need to be better teased out here. For, as proponents of the standard DH thesis suggest, it is these very implications which lie at the core of the covering law model and the conditions for innocence I have outlined above.

First, since it is impossible for a rational and good will to do evil- since perfection is “not a chimerical idea” (Kant, 2002: 62) - it follows that any immoral act *must* also be irrational. Our moral lapses could be overcome were we more rational and acted in accordance with the CI. This gives rise to the second crucial implication of Kant’s theory: a conflict within morality is “inconceivable” (1990: 39). “The concepts of duty and obligation”, Kant

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<sup>22</sup> An example of an imperfect duty is the principle ‘Be beneficent’. See Kant (2002) and Becker (1993).

explains, “express the objective practical necessity of certain actions, and two conflicting rules cannot be both necessary at the same time” (1990: 39). Since goodness is conditioned upon the moral rightfulness of our actions, it is impossible for two moral rules to be both simultaneously right and obligatory. This would entail a practical contradiction, a disharmony amongst one’s maxims. For Kant, this is intolerable and incongruent with rational agency. “If it is our duty to act according to one of these rules”, he says, “to act according to the opposite one is not our duty and is even contrary to duty”. Hence “when two such grounds conflict, practical philosophy says ... that the stronger ground of obligation prevails” (1990: 40). When two duties (seem to) conflict, the CI is invoked to help us to determine our perfect duty. Consequently, the weaker ground of obligation is completely annulled<sup>23</sup>. Consider for instance Kant’s discussion of ‘the Inquiring Murderer’<sup>24</sup>, a scenario in which a murderer asks us of the whereabouts of his prospective victim. In this scenario, the absolute nature of the perfect duty of truthfulness totally overrides the imperfect duty of beneficence. As Kant says “to be truthful in all declarations is an absolutely commanding decree of reason, limited by no expediency” (1990: 347- 350).

Finally, because Kant’s theory is transcendental and absolute, the specific context or agent to which it is applied is unimportant. In connection to this, it cannot be the case that certain practical demands for action (those stemming from empirical circumstances) conflict with and override the demands for moral action. As Kant stresses in *Perpetual Peace*, since morality is “the sum of laws exalting unconditional obedience in accordance to which we ought to act”, it would be erroneous and “inconsistent that we should think of saying that we cannot act thus ... There can be quarrel between practical politics and morals” (1903: 161). Whilst Kant recognizes that moral and political action may *seem* to conflict, this conflict is only subjective: it exists in “the self-seeking tendencies of men which we cannot actually

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23 For a more detailed analysis of this point see Gowans (1990; 2001), Nussbaum (2007), Stocker (1990; 2000) and Donagan (1977; 1990).

24 I take this terminology from Korsgaard (1986), Rachels (2007) and Varden (2010).

call their morality, as we would a course of action based on maxims of reason”. Objectively, he maintains, there can be “no quarrel between morals and politics” (1903: 180). This is because “political maxims” are derived “from the pure concept of duty, from *the ought* whose principle is given *a priori* by pure reason” (1903: 180). In this sense, “politics cannot take a step back without first paying homage to morals ... all politics must bend its knee before right” (1903: 183). Contemporary politicians (or any public or private figure) cannot evade the thrust of the CI: they “cannot get away from the idea of right”. Nor must they “dare to base politics on expediency and refuse obedience to the idea of right” (1903: 174). To return to the issue of lying, the maxim ‘honesty is the best policy’ is, for Kant, “the necessary condition of politics” (1903: 163). In Kant’s ideal theory then, morality and politics coexist in harmony, reconciled under the CI (and by the ideas of universality and rationality).

### 2. 3. 2. *Innocence, Moral Perfection and Consequentialism*

“Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can”. John Wesley’s advice (quoted in Shafer-Landau, 2012: 112) captures the motto that defines the consequentialist outlook<sup>25</sup>. “Consequentialism”, Philip Pettit explains, “is the theory that the way to tell a particular choice is the right choice for an agent to have made is to look at the relevant consequences of the decision; to look at the relevant effects of the decision on the world” (1993: xiii). In essence, consequentialism involves a cost-benefit analysis: things are worth pursuing *iff* the benefits outweigh the costs. On the face of it, it is hard to deny the attractiveness of this view. In Amartya Sen’s words:

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25 Whilst consequentialism goes back at least to Bentham, the term is relatively new - it was introduced by Anscombe (1958). See Sinnott-Armstrong (2012), Moore (1903), Scarre (1996) and Shafer-Landau (2012).

We may well puzzle a bit if someone were to tell us ‘This project has little benefit and much cost - let us do it!’ We would think that we are entitled to ask ‘why? (or more emphatically ‘why on earth’?) Benefits and costs have claims to our attention. Furthermore, it may even be argued, with some plausibility ... that any “pro” argument for a project can be seen as pointing to some benefit that will yield and any “anti” argument must be associated with some cost (2000: 934).

Acting for the best, according to consequentialists, is reasonable - to prefer a lesser good to a greater one is, in some sense, irrational (c.f. Shafer-Landau, 2012; Mulgan, 2001; Brandt, 1972; Sinnott-Armstrong, 2012). “Rationality”, Samuel Scheffler explains, “is central to consequential evaluation. For “if one has a choice between two options, one of which is certain to accomplish a goal better than the other, then it is, *ceteris paribus*, rational to choose the former over the latter” (1988: 252). But it is not just that failure to employ an act that yields the best consequences is irrational. It is also immoral. It is in connection to this insight, proponents of the standard DH thesis indicate, that the covering law morality and the consequentialist variant of the view of innocence emerge. For, consequentialism involves the following procedure: i) determine all your options in a given situation; ii) for each option determine the value of its results (how much good or evil such actions produce) iii) pick the action that yields the highest ratio of good to bad results - this is our moral obligation. Doing anything else - failing to employ the action that strikes the greatest balance of good over bad - is morally impermissible. Simply put, our actions are morally right *tout court* if they produce the best available consequences or maximize the amount of goodness - we are innocent of moral transgression *iff* our actions are optimific.

Needless to say the differences between Kant’s theory and consequentialism (and the account of political morality that emerges from each of these theories) are striking. On the one hand, Kantians tell us that we ought to live and act in accordance to the CI: moral perfection is possible if we pay sufficient attention to the means of our actions, irrespective of what follows. For consequentialists on the other hand we must focus on the consequences

of our actions. It is, in other words, the ends, not the means that deem our actions morally perfect and innocent. But, at least to my inquiry, it is what these theories share that matters most. It is not just that both such theories ground morality on rationality - *ergo* to be guilty of moral culpability is to be irrational. More importantly, both such theories contend that morality should be premised on a single and overarching moral principle. This features explicitly in the most prominent version of consequentialism, Jeremy Bentham's and John Stuart Mill's Utilitarianism<sup>26</sup>. As Mill emphasizes:

There must be some standard by which to determine the goodness or badness, absolute and comparative of ends, or objects of desire. Whatever that standard is, there can be but one; for if there were several ultimate principles of conduct, the same conduct might be approved by one of those principles and condemned by another; and there would be needs some more general principle, as umpire between them (1990: 52).

What lurks in the background of Mill's remark is (once more) what standard DH theorists identify as the covering law model of morality: the belief that the primary task of philosophy is to help us to discern what we ought to do in a particular situation; and, that in doing what ought to be done makes for a perfect and innocent act. This, however, is possible only if there exists a single fundamental principle or law at the root of all morality. Whilst our everyday life seems to be messier, as several such principles exist, "a determinate order of precedence among them" is not impossible (Mill, 2000: 8). But this precedence, Mills maintains, is possible *only* if one presupposes that a single overarching moral principle or rule exists. Otherwise, establishing such precedence in instances where the various principles conflict seems far less plausible. Again, the lack of such a standard is perceived to be intolerable. For, this would deem perfection impossible: we would be unable to discern which

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<sup>26</sup> The Utilitarian tradition is of course comprised of many different theories. I shall say more on contemporary Utilitarian accounts in the next chapter.

the morally right or innocent action in certain circumstances is. “Though the application of the standard may be difficult, it is”, Mill tells us, “better than none at all” (2000: 46).

For utilitarians then, the *summum bonum* is to be found in the principle of utility<sup>27</sup>. Simply put the goodness of outcomes - the rightness of actions insofar as they affect outcomes - is judged by the degree to which actions secure the greatest benefit to all concerned: the greatest happiness for the greatest number (Bentham, 1780). As Bentham explains:

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do ... The standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne ... The principle of utility ... assumes [this] for the foundation of that system, the object of which is to rear the fabric of felicity by the hands of reason and of law. Systems which attempt to question it, deal ... in caprice instead of reason, in darkness instead of light (1780: 11).

In short, utilitarians assume that, for rational and moral individuals, all that matters is pleasure or welfare and the absence of pain - these are the specific consequences which we ought to promote or avoid respectively. Utility, in other words, constitutes the directive law of rational human conduct: it is from this simple principle which all our duties stem. Differently put, what one ought to do in a particular situation, requires one to discern the action which is conformable to the principle of utility. It is only via such a value, according to Bentham, that “the words ought, and right and wrong ... have a meaning” (1780: 13).

In essence, utilitarianism is a universal and impartial theory. The principle of utility forms a general and universal guide: it tells us how a rational agent ought to behave if she attached equal weight to the well-being of all agents. And it is this principle which should be invoked in order to resolve any uncertainties we may have when pondering what we

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<sup>27</sup> For a more detailed elaboration of Utilitarianism, see Shafer-Landau (2012), Williams (1973a), Rachels (2007), Mulgan (2001) and Kymlicka (2002).

ought to do. As Mill puts it, “if utility is the ultimate source of moral obligations, utility may be invoked to decide between them when their demands are incompatible” (2000: 46). Of course, like Kant, Mill also recognizes that moral conflict might seem to be *prima facie* possible: “there exists no moral system” he says in *Utilitarianism* “under which there do not arise unequivocal cases of conflicting obligation. These are the real difficulties, the knotty points in the theory of ethics and in the conscientious guidance of personal conduct” (2000: 46). But, such conflicts are mere chimeras: the existence of a supreme moral value implies that these can be perfectly resolved. For, the only object of goodness for this school of thought is “the multiplication of happiness” (Mill, 2000: 34). If we ensure that our actions accord with the principle of Utility we would realize our true nature: we would become as rational and impartial as “a disinterested and benevolent spectator”. This, Mill contends, constitutes “the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality” (2000: 32). Hence the more specific Utilitarian version of innocence and perfection: one is innocent of moral transgression - *ergo* morally perfect- if one’s actions adhere to the principle of Utility.

#### **2.4. The View of Innocence: Key Features and Implications**

So far, I have been trying to clarify and reconstruct a view which has been subjected to severe criticism by proponents of the standard DH thesis: the view of innocence. In so doing, I have turned to our two most dominant moral theories which, according to standard DH theorists, constitute the main contemporary promulgators of this view: Kantianism and Utilitarianism. As I have noted, the account of morality that forms the background of these moral theories is quite similar. And, so too is the general vision which emerges from them: a vision of what is morally and rationally possible in human life. As Gowans tells us, both such theories put forward:

a standard of perfection that, though difficult to attain, is nonetheless thought to be within the reach of us. The standard is moral innocence, or moral purity, the ideal of living one’s life in such a way as to fully

comprehensively and harmoniously respond to the requirements of morality and thereby exclude all forms of moral wrongdoing (2001: 219).

At the core of the view innocence lies the conviction that perfect goodness and moral innocence are not only plausible but also constitute a necessary and sufficient requirement of morality. Differently put, as long as we focus our rational energies into developing an accurate understanding of what we ought to do - this, according to the 'covering law model' is the sole concern of morality - perfection and innocence must be realizable in our lives. This deeply optimistic outlook of human life is captured in the following line of thought:

There is much that happens to us in our lives which is bad ... However, in contrast to what happens to us, there is who we are and what we do, a matter which is not due to factors beyond our control ... goodness must be possible ... At some deep level it must be possible to attain moral innocence. For we need to believe that the obstacles of moral innocence are all internal and surmountable by effort. (Gowans, 2001: 219 - 220).

The view of innocence sits well with the standard accounts of political morality I have outlined in the introduction of the thesis. As I have gestured, a key implication of most ideal theories is that, at least in theory, it is not implausible to think that politics could be sanitized. In a similar vein, the view of innocence suggests that the various immoralities and outrageous acts of wrongdoing permeating our contemporary world - whilst difficult to extinguish - are not irremovable *per se*: all it takes is sufficient and arduous effort. True, few of us - and very few of our politicians - might ever achieve this; our contemporary despair and outrage may well ensue. We may be too irrational, weak and corrupt to ensure that our actions are always innocent *tout court*. The obstacles to moral perfection and innocence can be numerous. But it is our own irrational lapses that are to be blamed. For, the vision of perfection and innocence must exist. This much we (assume) to know. It is a terrifying thought

that perfection and innocence might never be attainable. If there were no preserve of perfection which our best efforts could achieve, the moral universe would be fundamentally unfair.

It is worth adding that the view of innocence and perfection put forward by Kantianism and Utilitarianism is sustained by a version of what proponents of moral conflict and value pluralism such as Isaiah Berlin (1990) and Stuart Hampshire (1987) term the Platonic Ideal or the doctrine of final rational harmony respectively. As indicated, at the core of this ideal lies the assumption of value-monism: “the notion of the perfect whole, the ultimate solution in which all good things coexist” (Berlin, 1990a: 13). It is this *a priori* assumption of the possibility of harmony, wholeness and tidiness (as opposed to conflict, pluralism and messiness) which sustains the image of perfection and innocence. For, if moral perfection is possible, conflict is always bound to be avoidable: it is the product of irrational and ameliorable human mistakes. “Perfect beings”, Berlin remarks, would not know conflict: “there can be no incongruity, and therefore neither comedy nor tragedy in a world of saints and angels” (1990c: 185). The Platonic lineage of the view of innocence is explicitly acknowledged by Gowans who writes that<sup>28</sup>:

With few exceptions ... philosophers from Plato on have viewed moral dilemmas as mere appearances. This has certainly been the case in the two predominant traditions of modern moral philosophy - Kantianism and Utilitarianism. Both Kantians and Utilitarians have thought that, for any apparent conflict, either one of the conflicting ought statements is not true or the two statements do not really enjoin incompatible actions ... It is thought to be impossible

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28 The Platonic lineage of the view of innocence is also explicitly acknowledged by de Wijze who tells us that “Plato's work in *The Republic* and elsewhere can be plausibly interpreted as an attempt to offer a way of ensuring rational self-sufficiency in the face of luck and the fragility of goodness” (2005: 455) .

that morality could actually impose upon an agent two ‘oughts’ when both cannot be fulfilled (1990: 4).

Or, as he emphasizes later on:

Discussion of moral conflict has roots deep in the history of moral philosophy. Among classical theories, the doctrine of the unity of the virtues in Aristotle (1980, VI, 13) implies that there can be no conflict among the virtues (1990: 5).

Herein emerges the version of the Platonic Ideal that DH theorists criticize - what we can term the Non-Remainders thesis: the belief that moral conflicts, either within individual morality or between morality and politics, are perfectly resolvable *in an action guiding sense* and carry no moral remainder. Simply put, the view of innocence maintains that any conflict between moral and political action is fictitious: it does not pose a threat to the possibility of perfection or innocence. For any such apparent conflict the fundamental principle of morality - be it the Categorical Imperative or the Principle of Utility - forms a single currency or scale on which conflicting values can be measured and hierarchically ranked or classified into a tidy and seamless moral lexicon.

At this point, it is worth emphasizing two intertwined issues. First, I do not wish to suggest that the view proponents of the standard DH thesis seek to upset adequately captures Berlin’s, Hampshire’s (and Machiavelli’s) insights on harmony and monism - or, in reverse, that the standard DH thesis does justice to their insights on conflict and pluralism. As I shall demonstrate in chapter 4, despite its purported Machiavellian lineage, the standard DH thesis fails to take Machiavelli’s insights on conflict and pluralism seriously: it fails to live up to its capacity to capture the complexity of political ethics and collapses into the idealism it seeks to evade. For, the standard DH thesis is inadequately ‘static’: it conceives the conflict between morality and politics as a momentous paradox of action - an anomaly disrupting the normality of past and future harmony. The upshot of this, as I shall explain, is

that the DH thesis misconceives *the extent* of the rupture between morality and politics: it displaces Machiavelli's recognition that such a conflict is perpetual. But it also misconceives *the nature of such a conflict*: by virtue of its overemphasis on action, the orthodox way of thinking about the problem of DH fails to capture the way moral character enters and jeopardizes politics. Simply put, by virtue of its failure to take Machiavelli's realist insights into an earnest consideration, the standard DH thesis fails to adequately capture *what it means to have DH* in relation to certain on-going activities such as politics. Second, whilst Gowans (1990) is right to suggest that Aristotle's ideal moral theory does reject the possibility of conflict, it does not follow that there are no significant differences between his account and those propounded by Kantians and Utilitarians as standard DH theorists often seem to argue (c.f. Gowans, 1990; de Wijze, 1994; 2009). For, as I shall suggest in chapter 5, unlike the heirs of the Enlightenment, Aristotle held that morality should be grounded on the virtues and that it should be understood in teleological terms - not merely in terms of abstract action-guiding principles (MacIntyre, 2005). And, it is precisely because proponents of the standard DH thesis have inherited a non-teleological view of morality from the Kantians and the Utilitarians that they displace Machiavelli's insights and fail to adequately capture what it means to lead a virtuous life of politics.

Regardless of all this however, what I merely want to suggest here is that the view of innocence shares with the Platonic Ideal this much: both positions put forward an argument for "the coherence and harmony of the moral universe" which translates into the conviction that it is neither difficult nor implausible to live a perfectly moral and innocent life in politics (Walzer, 1973: 161). In other words, ordinary morality can and should be reconciled with politics. What is worth adding to this, is that this vision of morality as tidy and harmonious has not been merely the product of philosophical discussion. In addition to the public pundits I cited in the introduction of this thesis, this view has been expressed by various prominent political figures. For instance, Vaclav Havel emphasizes that politics cannot be incompatible with ordinary morality: "whilst some say that I am a naïve dreamer who is

always trying to combine the incompatible”, he says, “I am still deeply convinced that it is simply not true that a politician must lie or intrigue. That is utter nonsense ... the *sine qua non* of politician is not the ability to lie” (2000: 11). In a similar vein, Thomas Jefferson indicates: “I never did or countenanced, in public life, a single act inconsistent with the strictest good faith; having never believed there was one code of morality for a public and another for a private man” (quoted in Hollis, 1982: 390). Consider too the following comment from Jimmy Carter, shortly before he assumed the Presidency of the USA: “a nation’s domestic and foreign actions should be derived from the same standards of ethics, honesty, and morality which are characteristics of the individual citizens of the nation” (quoted in Garrett 1996: 9). What unites such political leaders is the denial of any objective conflict amongst politics and morality: these coexist in harmony.

Of course, it remains to be seen whether this vision and its implications are adequate. Indeed, one may wonder whether we do have any *a priori* guarantee as to whether the assumption of harmony which permeates the Platonic Ideal and the view of innocence and which sustains the view of perfection (regardless of its specific form) is possible even in theory. In connection to this, it might be worth mentioning here that even the philosopher who first advanced the vision of harmony and perfection (both in individual as well as societal ethics) does not deny that lying has a place in politics: Plato suggests that the philosopher kings of his ideal Republic are allowed to lie to their enemies and their citizens<sup>29</sup>. Of course, because Plato held that ‘virtue is one’ it was inconceivable that the philosopher kings could ever bear a moral imperfection or blemish of any sort. But, one may wonder whether lying is a virtue, or whether the act of lying is devoid of any moral blemish. And, if Plato’s politician, who is situated in an ideal world, cannot avoid telling a lie - hence com-

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29 Even more ironic, perhaps, is the fact that the vision of societal harmony Plato so strenuously seeks to maintain in his ideal Republic is maintained by a lie. See Plato (*The Republic*) and Parrish (2007). I discuss the possibility of societal harmony and its implications for the dynamic account of DH in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

mitting what, seems to be an act of immorality - what of much less ideal circumstances then? For what is worth, even Jimmy Carter - one of the proponents of the Platonic Ideal and the view of innocence - failed to import and incorporate the honesty which purportedly characterizes morality into the realm of politics and of political action (the 1976 pamphlet published in Harper's magazine entitled 'Jimmy Carter's pathetic lies' is suggestive here<sup>30</sup>). To be clear, I do not wish to provide a comprehensive critique of the view of innocence or of the Platonic Ideal here. What I want to highlight though is that, there is no reason to suppose that we should be armed with an *a priori* guarantee of the proposition that harmony is somewhere to be found. Nor is this proposition easily demonstrable if we fall back on the ordinary resources of experience and empirical observation.

## 2.5. Conclusion

My aim in this chapter was to consider where the orthodox way of thinking about the problem of DH comes from. In so doing, I sought to outline a view which has been severely criticized by standard DH theorists as idealistic and which seems to sit well with the popular way of reflecting on political morality I have outlined in chapter 1: the view of innocence or clean hands. I suggested that, moral innocence (as criticized by proponents of the standard DH thesis) refers to the absence of guilt or culpability: one is innocent and morally perfect *iff* one's actions or deeds are always morally right *tout court*. I then sought to clarify this view and its implications, by turning to two of our most predominant moral theories - Utilitarianism and Kantianism - which, according to proponents of the standard DH thesis constitute the two most prominent sources of expression of this view. Their differences aside, both such theories share a very particular way of reflecting on political morality. This boils down to the postulation that morality must be premised on a *summum bonum* - a fundamental and universal moral principle. Intertwined with this postulation, is the 'covering law' model of morality: moral perfection and innocence is plausible as long as we

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<sup>30</sup> See Brill (1976).

ensure that our actions consistently adhere to such an overarching moral principle. As I have additionally explained, at the core of the view of innocence lies a version of the Platonic Ideal, what I have termed, The Non-Remainders Thesis: the conviction that moral conflicts either within individual morality or between morality and politics are perfectly resolvable *in an action guiding sense* and carry no significant moral remainder. What this view consequently denies or seeks to suppress, is the possibility of moral conflict or tragedy. For, since moral values are ultimately combinable and compatible into a perfect and harmonious whole, a clear-headed person cannot encounter irresolvable moral problems; all immoralities emanate from our own irrational mistakes and are (at least in principle) eliminable.

But I have also registered a *prima facie* uneasiness about the assumption of harmony that underpins the view of innocence. Whilst it was not my principal aim here to challenge the view of innocence or the Platonic Ideal, I have suggested that the assumption of harmony is hard to defend in practice. Nor do we have any reason to presuppose that conflict between morality and politics should not be intrinsic to a theoretical account of political ethics. In the next chapter, I shall turn to an alternative account of political morality which seems to take the possibility of conflict between morality and politics - and consequently the possibility of imperfection and tragedy - more seriously, and which presents a serious challenge to the view of innocence: the standard DH thesis.

### 3. The Standard Dirty Hands Thesis

*The implication that something can be right without being expedient,  
Or being expedient without being right,  
is the most pernicious error that could be introduced to human life.*  
Cicero<sup>31</sup>

*There are great occasions in which some men are called  
to great services, in the doing of which they are excused  
from the common rule of morality.*  
Oliver Cromwell<sup>32</sup>

#### 3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I outlined a familiar way of reflecting on political morality which has invited considerable criticism by proponents of the standard dirty hands (DH) thesis: the view of innocence. In this chapter, I want to consider the contemporary DH thesis as an alternative account of political morality. Doing so, might enable us to break away from certain assumptions and insights of the view of innocence which appear to be less than satisfactory: the conviction that the conflict between morality and politics is only apparent and fictitious.

Before outlining the aims of this chapter in more detail, let me open with an example, so as to sharpen the focus. On September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1949, Sir Stafford Cripps, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, announced the devaluation of the British pound. Though much has been written surrounding the rationale of this policy, I want to draw attention to a less cited aspect of the case - one which lies at the heart of the controversial questions which politics has tended to pose regarding the authority of our common moral understandings. When Cripps announced the decision to take the British pound off the Gold Standard, Churchill pointed

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<sup>31</sup> *De Officiis*, II.9

<sup>32</sup> *Memoirs*, 567

out that Cripps had publically denied this possibility, even though he had already made his decision. In short, Cripps intentionally lied and deceived (Hazlitt, 1960; Fleishman et al, 1981). By revealing his true intentions, Cripps would have precipitated a financial crisis undermining any benefits that the devaluation would have otherwise achieved. On the other hand, lying is considered to be a morally unacceptable act, especially if done to Parliament as it renders proper decision-making by representatives impossible. Cripps' case provokes a question which still perplexes political philosophers: How should we evaluate decisions where moral wrongdoing often becomes an essential means towards the fulfilment of significant political ends? The way this question is addressed raises interesting implications for the way we think about political ethics. As Igor Primoratz (2007) and David Shugarman (2000a) indicate, there exist two distinct responses to the above question: i) the morality as 'seamless view', or the 'closure view'<sup>33</sup> and ii) the dirty hands (DH) thesis which is mostly owed to Michael Walzer (1973; 1977).

The 'morality as seamless view', captured in Cicero's remark in the title quote and traceable back to the teachings of Plato, holds that moral politics is far from an oxymoron. Rather, ordinary moral considerations are of fundamental significance in the evaluation of political actions. This contention is akin to the view of innocence: the apparent conflict is perfectly resolved via the application of a moral principle. As a consequence of this harmonious solution, the agent's innocence remains intact. On the one hand, deontologists suggest that politicians should serve the public's interest via honest means, rather than resorting to cruelty and deception (Garret, 1996; Shugarman, 2000a). Assessed through the conventional Kantian lens, Cripps' decision to lie was immoral; lying is always wrong, and should be avoided no matter the circumstances. The strict deontological position holds that, since one's duty is one's duty, morality demanded from Cripps to reveal the truth, and that is all there is to say: case closed. On the other hand, utilitarians would suggest that, if Cripps' lie maximized the utility of the

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33 This is alternatively termed as the moralistic view of politics (Bok, 1989; Garret, 1996).

greatest number (and because only one prospective action can bring about the best end-result), all other actions are deemed immoral. Cripps was morally right to lie: case closed. If the only way of avoiding a financial catastrophe was for Cripps to lie, many people would agree that this is what he should have done. However, in doing so, should his actions be characterized as right, *tout court*?

Against this view, and in line with Cromwell's suggestion in the title quote, the standard DH thesis holds that, in certain circumstances, public officials may face *a paradox of action*: they may be required both from a normative and a prudential perspective to do or tolerate things that are wrong, even sometimes genuinely evil and morally unacceptable (c.f. Walzer, 1973; Klockars, 1980; Dovi, 2005; Coady, 1993; 2000; 2009; de Wijze, 1994; de Wijze & Goodwin, 2009; Stocker, 1990; Garret, 1996; Shugarman, 2000a; Primoratz, 2007; Blattberg, 2013). So, whilst lying is wrong and ought to be avoided, Cripps' decision to lie, in this circumstance, was justified, even laudatory. Simply put, Cripps' decision is right, all things considered, but also somehow wrongful.

The discussion in this chapter is organized in four parts. In the first part, I offer a preliminary consideration of the standard DH thesis, discussing (what its proponents perceive to be) its historical and terminological origins and the general idea underpinning it. In the second part, I build on Michael Walzer's compelling suggestion surrounding the distinctive nature of political action and offer an understanding of DH as a problem of political morality. In particular, I shall examine the key conceptual features and implications of the standard DH thesis and extrapolate them as a set of propositions. Then, I suggest that, whilst DH will remain inescapably a *political* problem, in order to grapple fully with the complexity inherent in the paradox, it is necessary to conceive DH as a *philosophical* problem. Doing so, shall enable us to elucidate the way DH theorists challenge the hopeful premises and implications of the view of innocence. In the fourth and final part, I consider how, according to Walzer's (1973; 1977) 'Catholic' account, the democratic politician should respond to the dirt on his hands. In so

doing, I want to register a doubt as to whether the standard DH thesis is ultimately that different from the view of innocence. As I show, whilst proponents of the standard DH thesis purport to capture the recognition that morality and politics conflict, they simultaneously contend that there might be a way out of this conflict. In short, the orthodox way of thinking about the problem of DH suggests that sanitizing political life is not implausible: there could, in fact, exist a way for the dirty politician to restore his forgone innocence.

Despite this last *proviso*, the standard DH thesis seems to provide a considerable advance on the way we think about political morality. In contrast to the harmonious and unified view of our moral cosmos advanced by the view of innocence, the standard DH thesis purports to capture a more nuanced, realistic and disunited aspect of political morality: at the core of this thesis lies the recognition that the innocence of the political agent, though indispensable, is far from guaranteed. The existence of plural values stemming from the disunity between ordinary or private and political or public morality may, in certain scenarios, conflict and give rise to the phenomenon of inescapable moral wrongdoing. In short, orthodox accounts of DH - by virtue of their purported acknowledgment of moral conflict - seem to reveal pessimistic insights surrounding the possibility of innocence and perfection in politics: the fragmented and messy nature of our moral reality deems inescapable certain 'living, forced and momentous' situations, to borrow the phrase from William James (1896). In these tragic situations, the politician is confronted with the prospect of having to sacrifice his innocence and, in the absence of some form of expiatory punishment or *catharsis*, become morally tainted.

### **3.2. Innocence Lost and the Standard DH thesis: Some Preliminary Considerations**

Even though the concept of DH is relatively new, the image which the metaphor of dirt evokes is an ancient one, and partly underpins the tendency of our philosophical tradition to

intertwine the ideas of morality, innocence and cleanliness and to oppose them to a bundle of concepts employed to denote immorality, such as those of dirt and pollution. The expressions of ‘one dirtying his hands’ and ‘washing one’s hands in innocence’ originate in the Bible. A local murder required the community’s elders to slay a calf, wash their hands in its innocent blood and testify “our hands did not shed this blood” (Deuteronomy, 21: 6-7; quoted in Kaptein & Wempe, 2002: 175). It is also in the Bible where we find perhaps the best known image surrounding the problem of DH. Faced with a lynch mob of his Jewish subjects demanding the death of a Nazarene troublemaker, Pilate took water and washed his hands before the masses, saying “I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it” (Matt. 27:24; quoted in Hollis, 1982: 394). But the term dirty hands employed in discussions surrounding political morality in fact derives from Jean-Paul Sartre’s play *Les Mains Sales*, which dramatizes the relationship between morality and the demands of *realpolitik*<sup>34</sup> (c.f. Walzer, 1973; de Wijze, 2005; Khawaja, 2004; 2008; Klockars, 1980). The exchange between Hugo, a young idealist, and Hoerderer, the revolutionary leader of the ‘underground’ communist party, is taken by proponents of the standard DH thesis to be particularly illuminating, as it provides an insight into the key idea of this problem:

Hoerderer: How you cling to your purity young man! How afraid you are to soil your hands! All right, stay pure! What good will it do? Why did you join us? Purity is an idea for a yogi, or a monk ... To do nothing, to remain motionless, arms at your sides, wearing kid gloves. Well, I have dirty hands. Right up to the elbows. I’ve plunged them in filth and blood. But what do you hope? Do you think you can govern innocently? (Sartre, 1955: 224)

Hugo is left with a question which continues to plague moral and political philosophers: Do you think you can govern innocently? As standard DH theorists indicate, Hoerderer’s haunt-

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<sup>34</sup> *Realpolitik* refers to realistic and practical politics rather than abstract moral considerations.

ing and powerful question possesses a sole, clear and disturbing implication: in line with St-Just's blithe remark that 'no one can govern innocently', Hoerderer chillingly suggests that they who possess political power and are borne with the responsibility of good and successful governance, must almost inevitably dirty their hands. They are, in short, compelled to commit actions which are morally heinous and thereby lose their innocence (Walzer, 1973; de Wijze 1994; 2005; Lukes, 1986; Shugarman, 2000a). It is precisely this striking proposition, the acknowledged impossibility of governing innocently which constitutes the defining feature of the standard DH thesis.

Moreover, the incompatibility and ultimately the loss of moral innocence which results from one's engagement in politics is typically traced to the works of Niccolo Machiavelli (*The Prince*) and Max Weber (1946) who warn us that politics does not provide a fertile ground for the salvation of one's soul. It is, however, the Renaissance Florentine who is so often perceived to be the *locus classicus* of DH. For, as Steve de Wijze explains, "Machiavelli ... the father of contemporary dirty hands theory, was the first to bluntly state that success in the world of realpolitik" requires one "to act in ways that are in conflict with compassion, forgiveness, fairness, and justice" (2005: 455). Machiavelli's disquieting recognition that it is necessary for politicians "to learn how not to be good and to use this knowledge or not use it according to necessity" (*The Prince*, 15: 61) has become the mantra of DH theorists<sup>35</sup>. Despite all its infamy, this quote from *The Prince* features proudly in most contemporary analyses of DH, including Walzer's (1973) eloquent account which constitutes the standard way of thinking about this problem.

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<sup>35</sup>"Machiavelli" is, according to Walzer, "the first man to state the paradox" of DH (1973: 175). De Wijze and Goodwin add that the DH thesis captures the "lesson we ought to take from Machiavelli": that politicians need "to learn to not be good" (2009: 531). See also Griffin (1989), Tinder (1986), Winston (1994), Ramsay (2000a; 2000b), Coady (1993; 2004; 2008; 2009), Blattberg (2013), Shugarman (2000a, 2000b) and Primoratz (2007).

To be clear, I do not wish to suggest that the standard DH thesis adequately captures Machiavelli's insights on *what it really means to have DH* in politics. For, as I shall demonstrate in this thesis, proponents of the standard DH thesis actually misinterpret and displace Machiavelli's (and Sartre's) ideas on political morality and conflict: they mischaracterize both *the nature* and *the extent* of the conflict between morality and politics<sup>36</sup>. This point forms a part of the *prima facie* doubt I wish to register against the standard DH thesis in the fourth section of this chapter and which I shall develop in more detail in the next chapters. What I merely want to emphasize for now though is this: the key insight of the standard DH thesis, according to its proponents, can be traced to the ideas of Machiavelli. And this insight, they maintain, captures the realities of politics neatly: it involves the recognition that, in certain tragic scenarios, an innocent course of action is unfeasible. It is to a more careful consideration of this conventional understanding of DH, one of the "central feature[s] of political life" (Walzer, 1973: 162), and its underlying objective presuppositions, components and implications I now turn.

### **3. 3. DH as a Political Problem: Core Conceptual Features of the Standard DH Thesis**

"All Kings is mostly rascallions", Huckleberry Finn noted (Twain, 2005: 167). Huck's observation forms one of the core themes of Walzer's justly famous article, entitled *Political Action: the Problem of Dirty Hands*. Walzer initially draws on, and reaffirms the remarks of his predecessors, expounding the "conventional wisdom", the wisdom of the rest

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<sup>36</sup> I should add here that, in advancing this claim, I shall also identify a neglected rift in the DH literature. For, my analysis suggests that, philosophers such as Stuart Hampshire (1989), Martin Hollis (1982), Richard Bellamy (2010), Sue Mendus (1988; 2009a; 2009b) and Bernard Williams (1978) who we may label DH theorists advance a more nuanced and realistic account of DH - one which is alive to Machiavelli's insights on political ethics and conflict. In chapter 4, I shall draw on their accounts in order to question the extent to which the standard DH thesis captures Machiavelli's insights on conflict, pluralism and DH.

of us, that politicians are a “good deal worse, morally worse, than the rest of us”. (1973: 162). This disquieting suggestion seems to be in line with the recent cries of political exasperation I documented in chapter 1, as well as our often cynical intuitions surrounding the world of politics - our perception of it as a ‘dirty’ business. In recent decades, we have witnessed some astonishing and wide-ranging acts of immorality amongst our public officials, spanning from expenses claims for pornographic videos and non-existent mortgages. In Thomas Nagel’s words, “the great modern crimes” have always tended to be “public crimes” (1978: 75). With politicians perceived as self-serving manipulators, we have come to expect them to take bribes, abuse public funds and cheat on their spouses. It is indeed remarkably difficult to evade the commonplace perception of politics as an unsavoury domain; and like Huck, Hoerderer and Machiavelli, Walzer seems to suggest that it is impossible for one not to pick up some of the odour and dirt that goes with its territory.

There appear to be various reasons, though, why Walzer’s observation surrounding the morally dirty status of our politicians is valid, some of which are also acknowledged by the view of innocence. For example, one may be irrational or wicked and immoral *tout court*. Nonetheless, the standard DH thesis explains such a ‘conventional wisdom’ with reference to another, far more intriguing and disquieting, set of cases. Like the Cripps incident mentioned above, cases involving DH are thought to reveal the complex moral choices associated with *political action*. Unlike cases involving irrationality or pure wickedness, where the agent’s internal impulses lead him to a failure to adopt a readily available and morally right avenue, in situations involving DH, the political agent is incapable of acting in a *tout court* morally right manner, because no such option is *a priori* available.

“The special intrigue of dirty hands”, Anthony Cunningham writes, “revolves around the idea that a morally sticky situation is thrust upon us and threatens our innocence through no fault of our own” (1992: 240). This is a crucial point which needs to be emphasized, for it provides an insight into what the paradox of DH assumes and what it involves in general.

Walzer's discussion of DH departs from the assumption that the *homo politicus* under consideration is "the sort of man who will not lie, cheat, bargain behind the backs of his supporters, shout absurdities at public meetings, or manipulate other[s]" (1973: 165). In essence, DH is particularly striking as it confronts morally good and innocent men who enter political life, "aiming at some specific reform or seeking a general reformation" (Walzer, 1973: 164).

Taking a cue from Walzer, the literature on DH distinguishes between acts of DH and those who inescapably suffer moral corruption through their sincere efforts to govern well on the one hand, and the morally dubious activities of the purely immoral and wicked on the other (c.f. Stocker, 1990; 2000; Gowans, 2001; Calhoun, 2004). The latter encompass a wide range of sleazy acts: "breaking the law for one's own advantage, stealing from public funds" and "enriching oneself or securing sinecures for one's family" (Williams, 1978: 56-57). Such acts, de Wijze explains, are unjustifiably immoral, as they constitute 'violations of an important normative principle or duty for unjustifiable motivations such as greed or self-aggrandisement' (2005: 468). In short, sleazy acts tend to be employed out of opportunism: the pursuit of self-interest with guile (Williamson, 1979; 1985; 1991; Milgrom & Roberts; 1992). In contrast, acts of DH involve immoral "actions or omissions occurring within a 'harness of necessity' " (de Wijze, 2005: 468). While in cases of unjustifiable immorality and mere sleaze, the character of the agent is said to be in need of reform, in cases involving DH "no reform of the agent's character or behaviour is necessary" (de Wijze, 2005: 466-469). For, as argued, the wrongdoing in question does not stem from internal immoral impulses, but is rather externally imposed and, in a way, tragically forced upon the agent<sup>37</sup>. Compared to the immoralities of the purely immoral or the wicked, then, in scenarios in-

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<sup>37</sup>As Sue Mendus puts it, DH theorists are not "especially interested in sleaze or scandal". Their emphasis is not the expenses and sex scandals that often hit the headlines. Rather, DH theorists focus on politicians "who do what is wrong in the service of some nobler - usually political - end" (2009a: 1).

volving DH, an innocent political agent is moved by political reasons to commit moral violations.

These moral violations, DH theorists argue, may be necessary for promoting the greater good. This feature is implicitly captured in one of the two examples discussed by Walzer (1973). Walzer presents us with a presidential candidate who is initially morally innocent, wanting to do good and only good, aspiring to put an end to corruption and other brutal abuses of power. This theme becomes central to his political campaign. His moral principles and innocence are soon nonetheless tested: in order to win the election, he must make a deal with an immoral ward boss, involving the granting of construction contracts during the time which he will serve in office. If the man sticks to his principles, he will fail to fulfil his pre-election promises. This decision would not only lead to a failure to promote the public good and eliminate corruption, but it would also contradict the politician's decision to run for office, which requires from him "to try to win, that is, to do within rational limits whatever is necessary to win" (Walzer, 1973: 165). Failure to do so, Walzer suggests, would make a mockery of the politician's decision to run for presidency, which was a commitment to the electorate and to those of us who regard the election as significant.

Apart from the promotion of the common good, acts of DH may be unavoidable and obligatory in situations where the political agent is forced to select between the "upholding of an important moral principle and the avoidance of some looming disaster" (Walzer, 1973: 160). This is evident in Cripps' case, but it is more dramatically presented in situations of 'supreme emergency', as discussed in Walzer's *Just and Unjust Wars*. In such cases, Walzer (1977) explains, the 'harness of necessity' has a far more tragic flavour: the necessary immorality extends beyond mere acts of lying and deception to unavoidable acts of brutality and cruelty. One example of a supreme emergency is found in Walzer's (1973) Ticking Bomb Scenario (TBS). This example is worth considering for two reasons. First, the TBS has become a paradigm case of DH as it is often employed in contemporary discussions sur-

rounding the question of whether torture could be justifiable<sup>38</sup>. Second, despite the fact that this example is typically taken by standard DH theorists as indicative of the incapacity of the view of innocence to grapple the realities of politics, in the next chapter I shall suggest that the TBS is in itself a highly idealized and romanticized example. This point constitutes part of the wider and more all-encompassing critique I shall advance against the standard DH thesis - that it is inadequately 'static': it captures neither the realities of politics nor *the extent* and *the nature* of the rupture between morality and politics.

So, what I want to emphasize here is that standard DH theorists often invoke the TBS in order to suggest that the contention that torture is absolutely unjustifiable within liberal democracies is insensitive to the realities of politics. To be sure, the conviction that torture should invariably appear "on the 'never' list of the 'forbiddens' of human politics", to use Jean-Bethke Elshtain's words, is neither novel nor uncommon (2004: 77). And this is not without reason: the very history and identity of a large strand of our philosophical tradition in general and that of liberal democracy in particular is seemingly tied up with an absolute prohibition of torture. Torture, Michael Ignatieff (2004) explains, is an anathema to liberal democracy as it expresses the view that human beings are expendable. After all, few issues have been more settled in morality than torture: "the eradication of the moral basis for torture", Kutz writes, "has been one of the defining features of post-Enlightenment liberal politics" (2007: 235- 239). In a statement reflective of a large portion of the Enlightenment thought, Beccaria denounced torture as a "residue of the most barbarous centuries" (2003: 3). Similarly, this disgust for torture is naturally echoed in the Kantian postulation that such

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38As Cohan observes, "much of the commentary on torture has alluded to the necessity doctrine as justification for torturing a suspect who likely has information concerning a 'ticking bomb'" (2007: 1587). For discussions on the torture debate see Ignatieff (2004), de Wijze (2006), Calo (2009), Gaeta (2004), Meissels (2007), Kamm (2004), Levinson (2004) and Greenberg (2006).

acts are absolutely unjustifiable, as they fail to treat persons as ends in themselves<sup>39</sup> (see chapter 2). Recently however, with the rise of terrorism in the post 9/11 era, there have been suggestions that the action-guiding prescriptions of the absolutist position against torture might not always cohere with the realities of successful political action. In other words, political officials in liberal democracies may be at least partially justified in resorting to the use of torture against captured terrorists in order to divulge life-saving information<sup>40</sup>. It is this very suggestion which lies at the heart of Walzer's TBS.

The TBS, a classic example of an 'extrication' problem (Coady, 1993), imagines a politician who, on coming to power, inherits a colonial war. During his campaign, the politician has publicly pledged peace and de-colonization. While opening negotiations with the rebels, his capital becomes the target of a terrorist bombing campaign. As a result, his first decision as the new leader is hardly an enviable one. He is asked "to authorise the torture of a captured rebel leader who knows or probably knows the location of bombs hidden in buildings around the city, set to go off within the next twenty-four hours" (Walzer, 1973: 167). Walzer's politician is faced with two terrible options. If he decides to authorise torture he commits a terrible moral wrong, one that runs contrary to his moral convictions and pre-election promises which condemned torture as abominable. Yet, if the politician refuses to torture the prisoner, he is doomed to violate his primary responsibility to protect citizens from harm, failing to fulfil the duties of his office (Walzer, 1973; Nagel, 1972).

In circumstances where the DH problem is inescapable then, the political agent is tragically confronted with, what has been termed, a moral dilemma. The problem of DH, Walzer tells us, specifically stems from an effort "to refuse 'absolutism' without denying the reality of a moral dilemma" (1973: 162). Returning to the TBS for a moment, and following

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<sup>39</sup> The Kantian point is also advanced (albeit in a slightly different way) by Ramsay (2006; 2011) and Sussman (2005).

<sup>40</sup> This is also suggested by Ignatieff and Elshtain despite their conviction that torture is an anathema.

McConnell (1978; 2010) and Sinnott-Armstrong (1987a; 1987b), such a dilemma can be conceptually represented and generalized in the following way: i) the political agent is morally required, or ought to perform, each of two (or more) actions; the agent ought to do A (in the TBS A represents the ‘absolutist horn’ of Nagel’s (1972) and Walzer’s (1973) dilemma, and refers to refraining from torturing the prisoner, in accordance to the Kantian picture of morality) and B (where B refers to protecting the community and promoting the common good in accordance to utilitarian/ consequentialist moral predicaments); ii) it is physically possible to perform either of these actions separately but both (or all) of the alternatives cannot be adopted together and at the same time<sup>41</sup>.

The DH problem is such that the politician is being tragically caught between two conflicting and competing *reasons for action*, between utility and rights, which the agent is morally required to obey. But this problem is not merely one which stems from a rupture *within* morality. More specifically, DH is also said to stem from a rupture *between* morality and politics, each characterized by its own values: the paradox conceptually arises from what is, from one point of view, the pursuit of the overall public good and the fulfilment of one’s political duties, possible only by committing, what is from another point of view, that of ordinary morality, morally unacceptable acts (Nagel, 1972; Lukes, 1986). In Walzer’s words, the DH dilemma arises because there is a clash between the politician’s “political judgements, which are consequentialist in character” with the “moral judgements” of private or ordinary life, which are deontological (1973: 175). In short, the political agent is committed on the one hand to the consequentialist picture, which would promote an expedient political decision, and on the other, to a view of ordinary morality, in which the notion of *deon* is central. Here, according to Walzer, there is an echo of Weber’s (Machiavellian) indication that:

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41 A third criterion may be added to make explicit what is implicit in the above conditions: iii) there can be no option whereby refusing to adopt either of the competing oughts serves as a means to avoid the conflict (Stocker, 1990; de Wijze, 1994).

There is an abysmal contrast between the conduct that follows the maxim of an ethics of ultimate ends- that is, in religious terms, ‘the Christian does rightly and leaves results with the Lord’- and that which follows an ethic of responsibility, in which case one has to give an account of the foreseeable results one’s action (1946: 120).

Hence, the standard DH thesis suggests that the political responsibilities held by our political leaders are bound at times to conflict with absolutist principles which ought to bind every moral agent in private or social life; the political agent, once confronted with such a puzzle, is doomed to choose between “two courses of action both of which it would be wrong for him to undertake” (Walzer, 1973: 160). As a minimal requirement then, the DH problem is conceptually premised on the acceptance of the possibility that, in certain tragic circumstances, the politician’s act is bound to contain elements of moral wrongfulness<sup>42</sup>.

However, *pace* Kai Nielsen (2000), Howard Curzer (2006) and Irfan Khajawa (2004; 2008), and despite Walzer’s (1973) rather obscure and vague choice of terminology, this is not to suggest that a choice cannot be made by the politician, or that the DH problem is conceptually underpinned by a *genuine* moral dilemma, in a technical philosophical sense. A genuine moral dilemma is generally understood as a moral circumstance where ‘an all things considered’ right answer to the choice the agent faces is clearly absent, as neither of the conflicting moral requirements overrides the other in any relevant way; in other words acting in accordance to A or B are equally morally wrong<sup>43</sup> (Stocker, 1990; de Wijze, 1994; Coady, 2009; Parrish, 2007; Kis, 2008). In most scenarios discussed in the DH literature, even if the political agent is bound to be morally guilty if he employs either of the two alternatives or ‘oughts’, an all-things-considered morally right or justified answer seems to exist.

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42 See de Wijze, (1994; 1996), Stocker, (2000), Lukes, (2005), Winston (1994) and Parrish, (2007). This view is also expressed by Williams (1981; 1990) in relation to moral dilemmas.

43 A genuine moral dilemma is characterized by a sort of symmetry and incomparability. See Sinnott- Armstrong (1987a; 1987b), McConnell (2010) and Gowans (1990; 2001).

Despite “the numerous virtues of the absolutist position”, Walzer notes, “we would not want to be governed by men who consistently adopted that position” and allowed absolutist moral precepts to guide their political thinking and actions *in all* situations (1973: 162). The TBS constitutes one such case. Walzer is adamant that in the occurrence of such a tragic scenario the politician should “order the man tortured, convinced that he must do so for the sake of the people who might otherwise die in the explosions -even though he believes that torture is wrong, indeed abominable, not just sometimes, but always” (1973: 167). “Here is the moral politician”, Walzer says, “It is by his dirty hands that we know him. If he were a moral man and nothing else, his hands would not be dirty” (1973: 168). Though acts of torture are seen as no less barbarous than in the days of Beccaria, to maintain the Kantian maxim “better the whole people should perish” than that injustice be done (1965: 100) and refuse to get one’s hands dirty even ‘if the heavens fall’ is not just to overlook the realities of politics for the sake of an abstract action-guiding prescription. To refrain from torturing the prisoner in this circumstance would also ignore the central place which the notion of political responsibility invariably holds at the heart of our conceptions of political morality. In short, to adopt the absolutist action-guiding prescription is either to be condemned to political impotence and inexpedience or to risk committing even greater atrocities in the effort to make a recalcitrant world fit into one’s scheme of unattainable innocence. Thus, as Walzer puts it, “it must be right to get one’s hands dirty. But one’s hands get dirty from doing what it is wrong to do. And how can it be wrong to do what is right? Or, how can we get our hands dirty by doing what we ought to do? (1973: 164).

Despite the frequent disputes between DH theorists regarding the question of how to terminologically capture this problem, there is a notable agreement over the above conceptual point<sup>44</sup>. And it is precisely this conceptual point that partly renders the DH problem so

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44 I am referring here to de Wijze’s (1994), Stocker’s (2000) and Curzer’s (2006) suggestion that Walzer’s definition of DH as a moral dilemma is obscure. The differences between such theorists are merely terminological though - whereas Walzer (1973) and

provocative. For, the standard DH thesis acknowledges the existence of a *paradox of action*: in certain tragic circumstances, politicians are confronted with the prospect of ‘doing wrong in order to do right’ (Walzer 1973; Stocker, 1990; de Wijze, 1994; 2005; 2009). In other words, the DH thesis does not suggest that it is impossible to do “the right thing while governing” (Walzer, 1973; 161), or that, what de Wijze (1994; 2005; 2009), Ignatieff (2004), Hampshire (1989), Maskaliunaite (2007) and Lukes (2005) term as, the ‘lesser evil’, a moral choice which has more stringency, is not available. Rather, it advances the claim “that a particular act of government (in a political party or in the state) may be exactly the right thing to do in utilitarian terms and yet leave the man who does it guilty of a moral wrong” (Walzer 1973: 161). As Walzer similarly notes in *Emergency Ethics*, once confronted with such a dilemma, the politician should opt for the ‘utilitarianism or consequentialism of extremity’ which re-imposes itself; *ergo* the politician partially and momentarily overrides the ‘rights normality’ (Walzer, 2004a: 40). Whilst the consequentialism of extremity is conducive to politically successful and expedient action, it is simultaneously abominable if such an act is viewed through the lens of the deontological ethics operative in ordinary morality or private life.

As DH theorists indicate, the DH dilemma reflects the distinct characteristics of political life, and the ways it differs from ordinary morality or private life in general (Walzer, 1973; 2004a; 2004b; Weber, 1946; Bellamy, 2010; Buckler, 1993). It comes as no surprise then, that the foundations of the orthodox way of thinking about the problem of DH are said to be premised on the thought of Machiavelli. The standard DH thesis grants certain special immoral permissions to political leaders, when the predicaments of political expedience and traditional (or private) morality conflict and take divergent and mutually exclusive routes. Politics is a dirty business; consequently the problem of DH can be seen as a natural entail-

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Nagel (1972) describe DH as ‘moral dilemmas’, Stocker (1990; 2000) and de Wijze (1994; 1996; 2009) employ the term ‘moral conflicts’. Despite their criticism of Walzer’s choice of terminology they agree that DH involves *actions* which are justified but wrong.

ment of the dirtiness of the political arena. This disquieting assertion, which acknowledges the special, different and discontinuous nature and demands of politics from private or ordinary morality lies at the core of Walzer's defence of such a 'conventional wisdom', and is reinforced by three interrelated arguments, which I will explore in the next chapter.

But for the moment, all that needs to be highlighted is that the essence of the DH problem is that in fighting evil and promoting good, the political agent is simultaneously compelled to implement evil and 'temporize' with it (de Wijze, 2006). As George Orwell puts it:

We see the need of engaging in politics while also seeing what a dirty, degrading business it is. And most of us still have a lingering belief that every political choice, is between good and evil, and that if a thing is necessary it is also right. We should get rid of this belief which belongs to the nursery! In politics one can never do more than decide which of the two evils is the lesser, and there are some situations from which one can only escape by acting like a devil or a lunatic (1961: 434).

In DH scenarios, the political agent is prevented from engaging in a proper, morally pure, reaction to evil. As Weber remarks, the agent "contracts with diabolical powers and for his action it is not true that good can follow only from good and evil only from evil, but that often the opposite is true" (1946: 125). The paradox is such that "in numerous instances the attainment of 'good' ends is bound to the fact that one must be willing to pay the price of using morally dubious means or at least dangerous ones" (Weber, 1946: 121). This dual structure, the simultaneous coexistence of good and evil or moral rightfulness and wrongness in such acts, is also captured in Machiavelli's assertion that "while the act accuses, the result excuses" (*Discourses*: 139). It is seemingly odd and contradictory to say that a political agent is worse for doing his political duty and that he deserves, at the same time, both praise and severe moral criticism - that he behaves, in Orwell's words, 'like a devil or a lunatic'. Yet, this oddness is one of the defining features of DH; this phenomenon apparently

engenders an inescapable no-win situation for the politician as he is morally worse for performing his duty, but even *far* worse for failing to do so (Walzer, 1973; Nagel, 1972; Cunningham, 1992).

Therefore, the insights of the standard DH thesis extend beyond the mere consequentialist suggestion that the ends fully justify the means. This problem, Walzer explains, relates not only “to the coherence and harmony of the moral universe, but also to the relative ease or difficulty-or impossibility-of living a moral life” (1973: 161). The structure of the paradox is such that, in order to promote the good of the community and fight evil, the politician must justifiably become morally corrupted, by sacrificing and compromising his absolutist moral principles. In doing so, the *ex ante* morally innocent agent gets his hands dirty *ex post*, and consequently loses his innocence, as such actions, are in their very detail immoral and not definitive of an innocent man. In Walzer’s words “the innocent man is no longer innocent” (1973: 161). Rather, “now he is a guilty man” (1973: 167). The moral wrongfulness and dirt inherent in DH acts tarnishes not only the act itself, but also the agent (Stocker, 1990; 2000; de Wijze, 1994; Lukes, 1986).

Let us pause for a moment to take stock and, based on the above discussion, extrapolate the key objective features and conceptual components of the standard DH thesis as a set of propositions: i) DH stems from the fact that the political agent is confronted with a moral dilemma. ii) Unlike cases involving immoral actions stemming from irrationality or pure maliciousness, the DH thesis contends that this dilemma is posed to an *ex ante* innocent politician; this puzzle is not the product of one’s morally defective past actions or vicious character. In other words, the dirty acts in such scenarios are said to be inescapable - they are forced upon an *ex ante* innocent political agent. iii) The DH dilemma suggests that there exists a disharmony between successful political conduct and morality, as it precisely stems from a conflict between ordinary or private morality, characterized by a deontological ethic and consequentialist/ utilitarian moral concerns operative in the domain of politics. iv) Once

this dilemma is posed, the politician opts for the utilitarian/ consequentialist competing imperative, overriding the absolutist imperatives of ordinary morality. v) Whilst the politician's choice is perceived as the 'all things considered' morally right one, or the 'lesser evil', it still contains elements of moral unacceptability, to say the least. Thus, the standard DH thesis intriguingly stipulates that it is philosophically and practically possible for a political action to be simultaneously composed by elements of moral rightfulness and moral wrongfulness. In this sense, an act of DH is one which is a) morally justified even obligatorily, but also b) somehow morally wrongful, if not abominable. vi) This problem not only morally pollutes the act *ex post*, but also the *ex ante* innocent political agent, whose innocent and perfectly good moral record becomes tainted as a result of his DH acts.

The central claims and implications of the standard DH thesis seem to fly in the face of our most prominent ethical frameworks. To be sure, it is not just that the DH thesis - by virtue of its purported Machiavellian flavour - deems the action-guiding prescriptions of conventional Kantianism as unsatisfactorily abstract and insensitive to the realities of politics. The postulation that it is plausible for a political act to be simultaneously composed by elements of moral rightfulness and wrongfulness, morally tarnishing the political actor is regarded by proponents of the view of innocence as philosophically incoherent and perniciously erroneous, if not sheer non-sense. This much is also suggested in Cicero's claim in the title quote. In addition, contemporary absolutists such as Sharon Sutherland (2000) and Maureen Ramsay (2000a; 2000b) are unconvinced that an intelligible distinction between DH and consequentialism/ utilitarianism exists. In what follows, I shall take these two lines of criticism together and consider the way contemporary DH theorists typically respond to them. In so doing, I shall approach DH as a philosophical problem so as to examine how, according to its proponents, the standard DH thesis provides a considerable advance on the way we think about political morality *vis-à-vis* the view of innocence.

### 3.4. DH as a Philosophical Problem: Pluralism, Conflict and the Standard DH Thesis

The contemporary debate surrounding DH primarily revolves around the possibility and coherence of moral dilemmas and conflicts - and, as Walzer puts it, the “relative ease or difficulty-or impossibility-of living a moral life” (1973: 161). In other words, the debate concerns the question of whether the key insight of DH, the phenomenon of inescapable and justified moral wrongdoing - and consequently the loss of innocence - is a valid one<sup>45</sup>. As John Parrish (2007) points out, whilst the conceptual structure of DH is accepted without much argument, proponents of innocence deny that there is a problem of DH at all. Our two dominant moral theories, John Lemmon reminds us, are adamant that in situations of moral conflict “we are forced”, if we are to remain within the confines of morality and rationality, “to restore consistency to our code by adding exception clauses to our present principles or by giving priority to one principle over another or by some such device” (1965: 48). And, as I shall explain in due course, it is this denial of moral conflict that sustains the deeply hopeful view of innocence and perfection (and thereby deems the insights of the standard DH thesis blatantly contradictory and offensive to practical logic) that DH theorists challenge as unsatisfactorily idealistic.

Before proceeding any further though, it is worth emphasizing here that the view of innocence is not merely embraced by classical utilitarians or deontologists. Taking a cue from Mill and Bentham, contemporary utilitarians typically respond to suggestions of DH by accepting that certain apparent evil actions should, as a matter of fact, be performed or tolerated in order to achieve the maximum possible public utility, while in turn denying that such acts are morally wrongful in any way. For, whilst values may *seem to* conflict, to sug-

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<sup>45</sup> See Walzer (1973), Stocker (1990; 2001), de Wijze (1994; 1996) and Meissels (2007). The insights of DH are also accepted by proponents of moral dilemmas. See Nussbaum (2000; 2007), Gardner (2007), Gowans (1990; 2001), Statman (1995), Lemmon (1990), Marcus (1980), Williams (1990) and van Fraassen (1990).

gest that such conflicts are neither apparent nor perfectly resolvable is intolerable. For example, Richard Hare suggests that simple deontological principles have their place at the level of character-formation, and at the intuitive level (1972; 1978). But at the more fundamental, what he calls the ‘critical level’, “there is a requirement that we resolve the conflict” that may appear between moral duties in everyday deliberation (Hare, 1981: 26). The logical properties of moral judgement, which entail act-utilitarianism, preclude the possibility of insoluble moral conflicts. At the ‘critical level’ whether an action ought to be done is determined on the basis of the goodness of its consequences *vis-à-vis* those of the alternative courses of action: where whatever we do or fail to do leads to the occurrence of evil or sustains it, we do nothing wrong by doing the lesser evil. In a similar vein, Kai Nielsen stresses that in DH scenarios the political agent does what, all things considered, is the morally right thing to do: “the thing he ought - to - through and through ought- in the circumstances, to do” (2000: 22). In a restatement of this view, Irfan Khawaja argues that “what is morally right” and “what is morally expedient” should be equated and seen as converging; consequently “if an act is justified, it cannot be accurately described as ‘evil’, however bloody or repulsive it might be” (2008: 29). Hence, when faced with a choice between two evils, a political leader is *outright* justified in choosing the option which achieves the better (or less bad) all-round consequences; so presumably the agent has clean hands<sup>46</sup>. To claim otherwise, these philosophers insist, would reveal a conceptual mistake. In doing what one ought to do, the contention that we are simultaneously somehow wrongful is misguided and confusing, to say the least.

Similar remarks are made by more sophisticated deontological accounts, such as those of Alan Donagan (1977; 1990) and Kenneth Howard (1977) who generally follow Kant’s suggestion that morality is unitary and of a piece. Rather than facing the prospect of transgressing the demands of absolutism operative in ordinary morality or private life,

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<sup>46</sup> Walzer expresses this in the following way: “even when one tortures, his hands will be clean, for he has done what he should do as best he can” (1973: 169).

Donagan reformulates the deontological position and its counterintuitive action-guiding prescriptions. *Contra* Walzer, he suggests that common morality need not demand of the politician that she abstain from performing what DH theorists and consequentialists identify as the overall preferable course of action. He insists nonetheless, that such an action is *fully* morally justifiable for non-consequentialist reasons<sup>47</sup>: the deontological principle “thou shall not stand idly by the blood of thy neighbour” permits the politician to torture the prisoner and avoid getting DH. Therefore, for the sake of rationality, and via the application of an abstract principle, “the problem of DH dissolves” (Donagan, 1977: 188- 189).

Again, what emerges from the arguments advanced by both sides is a version of the Platonic Ideal which is deeply ingrained in the view of innocence - what I have termed in the previous chapter as, the Non-Remainders Thesis: the belief that moral conflicts either within individual morality or between morality and politics are perfectly resolvable *in an action guiding sense* and carry no moral remainder. Recall that this position generally assumes that all values are comparable and commensurable; a ‘lexical ordering’ of values is unproblematic and feasible or deontological considerations can be factored into a consequentialist calculation of the overall best course of action. Moral values fit neatly into a unitary and harmonious moral *cosmos* and, once the most preferred option is found, the competing ones are immediately discarded. In Lemmon’s words, “the situation is as it is in mathematics: there, if an inconsistency is revealed by derivation, we are compelled to modify our axioms; here, if an inconsistency is revealed in application we are forced to revise our

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47 Others, abandon Kantian absolutism for what is called “threshold” deontology, which holds that deontological norms govern up to a point; but when the consequences become so dire that they cross the stipulated threshold, consequentialism takes over (Coady, 2009). In the TBS for example, the politician may not torture the prisoner to save the lives of two others, but he may do so to save a thousand lives if the “threshold” is higher than two lives but lower than a thousand. Nonetheless, with the exception of Nagel (1972) and perhaps Walzer’s (2004a; 2004b) later modifications of the standard DH thesis which bear a certain resemblance to this position, threshold deontologists usually deny the DH problem.

principles” and discern which course of action accords to our actual duty and rationally resolve such an alleged conflict (1990: 112). Although a situation may *look* like a moral conflict, it is only an apparent one. For, moral conflicts are like puzzle solving: all we have to do is to find the right answer.

It is this postulation which has been severely criticized as unsatisfactorily idealistic by contemporary DH theorists. As Thomas Nagel exclaims, it is naïve and erroneous to hold that there exists a perfect “solution to every moral problem in which the world can face us” (1972: 144). This much is also suggested by Walzer who argues that, when the demands of political and ordinary morality collide, “we do not talk or act” as if the moral principles which had not been acted upon “had been set aside, cancelled, or annulled” (1973: 171). This is an important point that needs to be highlighted here. A central claim of the standard DH thesis is that attempts to deny the possibility of moral conflict deform and fail to do justice to a large portion of our evaluative world and to the realities of political action (c.f. Walzer, 1973; Cunningham, 1992; Stocker, 1990; de Wijze, 1994; 2006; 2009; de Wijze and Goodwin, 2009). To be sure, this is not to suggest that orthodox DH analyses *completely* reject these ideal theories. As indicated, Walzer’s conventional exposition of DH is premised on the acceptance of both of them. “These demands of deontology” and “consequentialism”, de Wijze points out, “all exert an influence in the complex moral lives of agents” (2005: 457). And it is precisely because the principles propounded by both such ideal theories are taken more seriously, that the belief propounded by each of them - that in situations of moral conflict an innocent course of action must exist- is deemed unsatisfactory. In other words, standard DH theorists suggest that our moral reality is much more complicated and messy than proponents of innocence would like to admit: our moral landscape is composed of plural values, which cannot be cashed out into a common currency of evaluation, as Mill and Hare believe was true for utility, nor can any such standard be given comprehensive and

fully overriding priority over other rival claimants, as Kant and Donagan hold for the superior standard of duty<sup>48</sup>.

In connection to this, I should (once more) highlight two issues here. First, in addition to Machiavelli, the pluralist insights of the standard DH thesis are also traced to more contemporary proponents of this idea such as Isaiah Berlin, Stuart Hampshire and Bernard Williams, who have drawn on the Florentine's ideas<sup>49</sup>. For instance, de Wijze tells us that: "I agree with philosophers such as Isaiah Berlin ... who argue for a plurality of values which can conflict with one or another and for which there can be no rational resolution" (1994: 18). Second, despite their acknowledgement of Machiavelli (as well as Hampshire, Berlin and Williams) I shall argue that proponents of the standard DH thesis fail to grapple adequately his insights on pluralism and conflict. They also fail to capture the complex reality of politics as they purport to do. For, as I shall argue in chapter 4, the standard DH thesis is inadequately 'static': it misconceives both *the extent* and *the nature* of the conflict between individual morality and politics. And, as I shall suggest in chapter 7, the standard DH thesis - by virtue of its 'static' interpretation of moral conflict in individual political ethics - also fails to adequately capture the messy and conflict-ridden context in which contemporary politicians operate. Simply put, the orthodox way of thinking about the problem of DH is, in fact, much more closely aligned to monism as opposed to the pluralist vision it purports to embrace.

What I merely want to emphasize for now though, is that a central claim of the standard DH thesis is that it provides an alternative way of thinking about political morality and our ethical *cosmos*. And this, as gestured, is intertwined with frequent references to the

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48 See Walzer (1973), de Wijze (1994; 1996; 2005; 2009), Stocker (1990) and Parrish (2007).

49 These theorists' more specific conception of conflict and pluralism shall become more evident in subsequent chapters, where I shall draw on their accounts to both criticize the standard DH thesis as well as develop my own distinct account of DH in politics.

realities of politics, moral conflict and pluralism -or, in reverse, to the inadequately idealistic assumptions of harmony and monism which permeate the view of innocence. For instance, Michael Stocker points out that, it is not just that consequentialists and deontologists oversimplify and “misunderstand ... large portions of our evaluative world” (1990: 12). They also “misunderstand what they over-concentrate on” (Stocker, 1990: 12). The alleged contradiction arises due to the fact that our prevalent moral theories subscribe to the covering law model of morality. As I have suggested in the previous chapter, these ideal theories are concerned only with addressing what Martha Nussbaum (2000) and Michael Neu (2012) term as ‘the obvious question’: the question of how, under some given circumstances, one should *act*. As DH theorists argue, what this dual commitment to value-monism and to the covering law model fails to capture are the two core (and intertwined) conceptual features of DH dilemmas: i) ‘double-counted impossible oughts’ and ii) ‘non - action guiding act evaluations’<sup>50</sup>.

The notion of ‘double-counted impossible oughts’ indicates the way in which values are employed as a means of discerning the overall value of an act and again in its own right. The latter notion refers to the fact that moral values have a force beyond simply factoring into an assessment of how one ought to act in particular situation. When confronted with a DH scenario, “the dirty feature”, the transgression of a moral principle, value or duty which ought to hold in private life, “is taken into account once in determining the overall value of the act and again on its own”. Such a feature is thus “double counted” (Stocker, 1990: 13). However, when this feature is taken up on its own, it is taken up in an evaluation that is not action guiding. As Walzer explains, whilst such oughts may not serve to guide one’s action, they neither evaporate nor are they completely discarded: they “still stand” (1973: 171).

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<sup>50</sup> These features - which are thought as “general and conceptually unproblematic” aspects “of our acts and moral reality” (Stocker, 1990: 13) - are also discussed by de Wijze (1994; 1996) and Cunningham (1992) and are implicitly accepted by Walzer (1973), Gardner (2007) and Gowans (2001).

This is exactly what is missed by our dominant moral theories. The vision that one is innocent of moral transgression - the postulation that in “doing exactly what is to be done ... “makes for a perfect act or at least one such that neither it nor its agent can be faulted” (Stocker: 1990: 12) - is plausible only because proponents of innocence erroneously over-concentrate on ‘overall, action- guiding act evaluations’ and completely ignore the partial, constituting considerations which compose the overall evaluation and are expressive of genuine values. So, in situations involving moral dilemmas or conflicts, the overall evaluation does not completely render impotent the moral significance of the ‘partial evaluations’ which are adjudicated and necessary to arrive at such an overall evaluation. Rather, the partial evaluations, the oughts which are not acted upon, “retain their moral relevance” (Stocker, 1990: 13). And, as de Wijze explains, such evaluations remain and “exert an influence on what one has become” (1994: 8). Such features are also evident in the examples I have discussed earlier. In short, proponents of the standard DH thesis contend that the consequentialist/ utilitarian oughts - reflected in Cripps’ actions to prevent an economic catastrophe and the politician’s decision to save the innocent lives in the TBS - take precedence (they are, in other words, morally right as overall, action guiding act evaluations). However, the partial constituting features of these actions - lying to the Parliament and press as well the torturing of an individual respectively - despite being overridden in terms of action-guidance, still exert influence on the characterization of such actions and consequently morally taint the agents’ innocence.

Even though the DH problem seems to be a startling oxymoron, to maintain that, in a scenario like the TBS or Cripps for example, the partial and constituting disvalue of the act of torture or of deception disappears, is even more counterintuitive. The view of innocence, by virtue of its overconcentration on abstract action-guiding principles, provides a rather over-simplified and detached account of the realities of political action which, in certain scenarios, is bound to be inescapably imperfect, messy and dirty. In other words, the view of innocence fails to account for the relatively widespread recognition “that a certain

course of action” may, indeed, be “the best thing to do on the whole in the circumstances, but that doing it involves doing something wrong” (Williams, 1972: 93; Walzer, 1973: 160). Herein emerges one of the central philosophical premises of the DH thesis, what is frequently referred to as the ‘Moral Reminders Thesis’: although moral conflicts are resolvable in an action-guiding sense, they are nevertheless not soluble *tout court*, as they involve a ‘moral cost’ or a ‘moral residue’<sup>51</sup>.

That there exists a ‘remainder’, which tells against the act and morally tarnishes the political agent, is further enhanced by de Wijze (1994). Taking a cue from Bernard Williams (1990), de Wijze suggests that the charges of logical inconsistency, irrationality and conceptual confusion are raised against the standard DH thesis, because the value-monism underpinning our prevalent moral theories is inescapably (yet fallaciously) intertwined with an assumption that values closely resemble cognitive beliefs. Consequently, when a conflict of beliefs occurs, the agent holds two beliefs that are inconsistent with one another due to empirical demands: *both* beliefs cannot be simultaneously true. Nor, is the conflict between these, genuine or (partially) insoluble. For instance, the beliefs that Obama is the President of the US and that Obama is thirty years old are inconsistent. For, in order to be President a citizen must be at least thirty-five years old. Either Obama is thirty years old and not the President of the US, or he is the President and not thirty years old. However, as de Wijze suggests, a conflict of values involved in DH scenarios more closely resembles a conflict of desires. For example, one may want both to smoke cigarettes and to be healthy. Such a conflict is not logically inconsistent, but rather presents itself as a conflict when the fact that smoking is unhealthy is added to the desires. If smoking was not unhealthy, a conflict of

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51 As suggested, such a ‘moral remainder’ not only pollutes the act itself but it also denotes that the innocence of the agent is eradicated *ex post*. See Walzer (1973), Williams (1972; 1990), Gowans, (2001), Stocker, (1990), de Wijze, (1994; 1996; 2006). This thesis is also emphasized in the literature of moral dilemmas. See Nussbaum (2007; 2000), Statman (1995), Sinnott-Armstrong (1987a; 1987b) and the collection of essays in Gowans (1990).

desires would not exist, and one could both smoke and be healthy without either desire interfering with the other. Contra the view of innocence, in these cases one is not able to find perfect solution to such a conflict by simply readjusting his desires. For, when one desire is foregone in favour of another, the force of the unrealized desire is not abandoned in the same way as a conflict of beliefs. Though quitting smoking and being healthy seems to be right as an overall evaluation, a particular desire to smoke - the partial constituting evaluation - will remain, despite being overridden and not acted upon.

To recap, the recognition that acts of DH are philosophically plausible and an inescapable feature of politics brings to the fore the inadequacies of the view of innocence. The standard of moral purity and perfection which is advanced by both consequentialists and deontologists is not just premised on a rather crude distinction between right and wrong. The deeply hopeful insights of the view of innocence depend much “on radically implausible views of value and action” (Stocker, 1990: 13) which ignore and leave unexamined problematic and pervasive aspects of the reality of moral life: the possibility of conflict, moral tragedy and inescapable wrongdoing<sup>52</sup>. In contrast:

A DH analysis provides a more plausible characterization of our moral reality ... The existence of genuine moral conflict, the incommensurability of cherished values, give rise to moral conflict situations where those who strive to act morally unavoidably get DH (de Wijze, 2009: 309).

*Pace* Sutherland and Ramsay, even if the standard DH thesis seems to have a relatively strong utilitarian/ consequentialist flavour (at least in terms of its action-guidance), unlike utilitarianism/ consequentialism, the purportedly value-pluralist portrayal of our moral reality underpinning the orthodox DH thesis, reveals a deep scepticism surrounding the conten-

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<sup>52</sup> See also Walzer (1973), Gowans, (2001) de Wijze (1994; 1996; 2009) and de Wijze and Goodwin, (2009).

tion that there exists a standard or algorithm which yields *tout court* correct or perfect solutions to moral puzzles to those who get their ‘calculations’ right. By virtue of its acknowledgement of moral conflict, the standard DH thesis disquietingly suggests that in politics, moral degradation and the loss of innocence can never be totally controllable. Even if politicians strive to maintain their innocence, in certain occasions this is largely, if not totally, beyond their control.

But the suggestion that DH is a politically realistic and philosophically coherent possibility raises a further question, especially if this problem is situated in the context of liberal democracies: How should the politician respond to the dirt on his hands in such a contemporary context? To put it differently, if innocence is lost, is such a loss irretrievable? In what follows, I want to explore how the standard DH thesis approaches this question. In doing so, I want to register a doubt as to whether the standard DH thesis is, after all, so very different from the view of innocence to which it is often opposed.

### **3.5. A Doubt about the Standard DH Thesis**

Situating DH within the democratic context creates additional and more contemporary conundrums. If the problem is viewed from the lens of democratic theory, the absolutist action-guiding prescription of the view of innocence seems to find an alternative mode of expression. As Sue Mendus notes, “those who focus on the nature of democracy are almost unanimous in thinking” that dirty acts ought to be avoided, as “they constitute a betrayal of democratic values” (2009b: 4). For instance, Peter Osborne stresses that “in a properly functioning liberal democracy there should be no call for the mendacity advocated by Plato or Machiavelli; citizens have a right to form a fair and balanced judgment, and are entitled to be informed about their political choices”. This, he argues, “includes a right not to be deceived”. For, “deception, even when practiced for the best of motives”, as the DH theorist

suggests, “is the worst kind of bad faith”<sup>53</sup> (2005: 119- 120). The main concern of theorists of democracy is that DH acts hinder, and are incompatible with, democracy in general and the democratic values of accountability and transparency in particular. Yet, for the reasons explored in the previous sections, this does not seem sufficient to eradicate the DH problem. Though such theorists may want politicians to allow democratic values and the imperatives of the (Kantian) view of innocence to guide their thinking in everyday decision-making, in certain circumstances, such a possibility is deemed impossible and undesirable. I shall explore in more detail some of the problems that permeate this way of thinking about democratic politics in chapters 6 and 7. What I want to emphasize here though, is that the democratic context and the above-mentioned values play an important role in Walzer’s (1973; 1977) analysis of how the DH politician should respond to the dirt on his hands. For, according to Walzer (1973; 1977), such values should steer the DH politician to respond in a very particular way to the tragedy which has befallen him. More importantly, these values also provide the basis for the hope that there might exist a resolution, albeit an imperfect one, to the problem of DH in politics.

Walzer’s claim that politics and morality might be reconcilable has received little, if any, attention in the literature of DH<sup>54</sup> but is an important one: it raises the question of whether the orthodox way of thinking about the problem of DH suffices. Whilst the standard conception of DH seems to initially embrace Machiavelli’s insights, it ultimately concedes that Machiavelli’s picture of political morality is undesirably bleak and should somehow be

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53 Similar claims are made by Bok (1980), Shugarman (2000b) and Thompson (1989).

54 The only authors who discuss this idea are Levy (2007), Meissels (2007) and de Wijze (2012). None of these philosophers however, challenges Walzer’s conceptual structure of DH. Levy and Meissels focus solely on the issue of punishment, and whether this is plausible, without discussing Walzer’s conviction that the politician’s innocence can (and should be) restored. De Wijze (2012) follows Walzer even closer and provides three justifications for punishing the DH politician, with the restoration of one’s innocence forming one of these.

resisted. In other words, whilst the conventional account of DH purports to challenge the monism of the view of innocence, the standard DH thesis and the view of innocence do not seem to be substantially different after all. For, Walzer's critique of the view of innocence veils a more fundamental agreement between this view and the standard DH thesis: whilst acting innocently is often deemed practically impossible - because, as DH theorists contend, in certain tragic circumstances the imperatives of politics and morality conflict - innocence, despite being momentarily lost, is still desirable and ought to be somehow restored and maintained. Differently put, there might exist a way out of the conflict between morality and politics; it might not be impossible to sanitize and clean up politics. Or, so we should hope says Walzer. It is to the exploration of this puzzling conviction I now turn.

In his seminal article, Walzer identifies three strands of thinking about the DH problem and how this is resolved: i) the Neoclassical tradition, ii) the Protestant tradition, and iii) the Catholic tradition, which is thought by Walzer (1973) as the most effective in dealing with DH in the democratic context<sup>55</sup>. The neoclassical tradition is represented by Machiavelli. Standard DH theorists, whilst acknowledging that Machiavelli was the first to argue that politicians ought to be allowed certain special moral permissions, suggest that his resolution to the DH problem is unsatisfactory (Walzer, 1973; de Wijze, 2012). The problem with the neoclassical view is that the Machiavellian politician has no 'inwardness' - that is, no state of anguish or, what de Wijze (2004) terms as, 'tragic remorse' about his behavior. As Walzer suggests, "if the politician is the good man I am imagining him to be", once he is confronted with a DH scenario, he will not merely acknowledge the moral force of the transgressed ought; he also will "believe himself to be guilty" (1973: 166). Machiavelli "is suspect", Walzer says, "not because he tells political actors they must get their hands dirty, but because he does not specify the state of mind appropriate to a man with dirty hands. What he thinks of himself we don't know... he is the sort of man who is unlikely to keep a

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<sup>55</sup> See also Griffin (1989) and Garrett (1996).

diary and so we cannot find out what he thinks.” Yet, “we do want to know” Walzer argues; and “above all, we want a record of his anguish”. (1973: 176). For this feeling, he maintains, is “a crucial feature of our moral life” (1973: 171). Thus, proponents of the standard DH thesis tell us, the intense feelings of anguish and pollution that are said to accompany acts of DH are not just an important feature of our moral reality. They also constitute one of the appropriate ways of responding to this problem<sup>56</sup>.

This is acknowledged by the Protestant tradition, which is represented by Weber (1946). The Weberian tradition perceives the DH politician as a ‘suffering servant’; it posits the politician as a tragic hero, who is (and should be) inevitably subject to remorse as a response to the DH acts he must perform or tolerate. In short, Weber’s politician accepts and suffers for the loss of his innocence. As Walzer states, “the self-awareness of the tragic hero is obviously of great value”, as “we want the politician to have an inner life”; yet, Weber’s attempt to “resolve the problem of DH entirely within the confines of the individual conscience” is “neither possible nor desirable” (1973: 177). The punishment and anguish of the Weberian hero remain too individual and too self-inflicted; and in the context of democratic societies the ‘suffering servant’ is not accountable to the political community.

For the Machiavellian politician there is no indication of his anguish; the Weberian politician has only himself. But the third account, whilst maintaining Weber’s view of politics as a tragic domain, is seen as capable of ameliorating the deficiencies of the first two: it suggests that “the hero's suffering needs to be socially expressed (for like punishment, it confirms and reinforces our sense that certain acts are wrong)”. This point is underpinned by Walzer’s conviction that “we don’t want to be ruled by men who have lost their souls” (1973: 177). Hence, whilst the loss of innocence may sometimes be inescapable in politics, Walzer seems to echo the contention shared by the proponents of innocence: that it is also intolerable. “A politician with dirty hands”, Walzer tells us, “needs a soul” and “it is best for

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<sup>56</sup> See in addition de Wijze (1994; 2005, 2009) and Griffin (1989).

us all if he has some hope of personal salvation, however that is conceived” (1973: 178). We need, therefore, to be able to hope that there is some prospect of ‘salvation’. Maintaining this hope, according to Walzer, requires the moral politician to reveal the dirt on his hands to the democratic community: “if he were a politician and nothing else”, Walzer stresses, he would conceal such dirt and “pretend that his hands were clean” (1973: 168). Hence, “it is not the case that when (the politician) does bad in order to do good he surrenders himself forever to the demon of politics”. Rather, Walzer suggests that, the DH politician “commits a determinate crime, and he must pay a determinate penalty. When he has done so, *his hands will be clean again.*” (1973: 178; my emphasis).

Walzer’s hopeful conviction is associated with Catholic theology: the sins of the political leader are redeemed through the effect of some external agency. This insight, he maintains, is aptly captured by Camus revolutionary protagonists in *Les Justes*, Janek and Stepan, who willingly submit to their executioner and are ready to pay the price for the blood on their hands. As Walzer argues: “the heroes are innocent criminals, just assassins”, because “they are prepared to die-and will die”. Having dirtied their hands, “only their execution, will complete the action in which they are engaged: dying, they need make no excuses. That is the end of their guilt and pain. The execution is not so much punishment as self-punishment and expiation. On the scaffold they wash their hands clean and, unlike the suffering servant, they die happy” (1973: 178). Just like Camus’ heroes then, the politician should reveal the dirt on his hands to the democratic community, which should ensure that he pays the price via some form of cathartic punishment: we should “punish him, for the same reasons we punish anyone else” (Walzer, 1973: 179).

Similarly, in *Just and Unjust Wars*, Walzer argues that politicians acting in supreme emergencies must “acknowledge the burdens of criminality... that one has also been forced to kill the innocent” and publically admit that this is “a kind of blasphemy against our deep-

est moral commitments”<sup>57</sup> (1977: 260- 263). And so, whilst it may be the case that the politician has done what his office required, he should nonetheless, “bear a burden of responsibility and guilt” (1977: 323). Even though punishing the politician who has revealed his DH is impossible “without getting our own hands dirty”, Walzer’s Catholic account postulates that, in the modern democratic context, closing the gulf opened by Machiavelli between morality and politics is conceivable. In other words, we should not lose hope that there could exist a resolution (albeit an imperfect one) to the conflict between morality and politics. The upshot of this is that, in Walzer’s account, it is not implausible to think that politics could be sanitized: there should be a way to remove the taint that polluted the politician’s otherwise innocent record. Simply put, it might not be the case that the problem of DH is insoluble after all.

### 3. 6. Conclusion

My aim in this chapter was to examine the standard DH thesis and explain how it provides an advance on the way we think about political morality *vis-à-vis* the view of innocence. I began by providing a general outline of the idea of DH - the contention that innocence and politics are incompatible - by briefly discussing (what its proponents perceive to be) its historical and terminological origins. Following Walzer (1973), I then offered a detailed examination of the DH thesis. I conceived DH as a political problem and extrapolated its key objective features and conceptual components as a set of propositions. As demonstrated, DH is premised on the recognition that in certain inescapable, tragic and dilemmatic scenarios, the demands of successful political action and the absolutist imperatives governing private or ordinary morality conflict and diverge. The political agent - through no fault of his own - is confronted with a *paradox of action*: he is moved by political reasons to em-

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<sup>57</sup> Walzer (1977) alludes to the example of Harris here, the commander of the Royal Air Force (RAF) in WWII, who was not honoured by his country after the war ended. I shall explore and criticize the way he presents this example in chapter 4.

ploy acts which are unacceptable from the viewpoint of ordinary morality and consequently lose his innocence.

As I have additionally explained, the central philosophical premise of DH - the suggestion that a political action can be all-things-considered morally right and justified yet somehow morally wrong - challenges the deeply hopeful insights of the view of innocence. Whilst the view of innocence solely concentrates on the question of 'what should I do' in such scenarios, and is underpinned by the assumption that our moral reality is harmonious, conventional DH analyses suggest that when the imperatives of ordinary and political morality conflict, a perfectly clean-handed solution is impossible. When the politician opts for one of the conflicting oughts - the 'consequentialism of extremity' (Walzer, 2004a) - the moral force of the competing ought, is not overridden: it is a moral remainder which still exerts influence and thereby blemishes both the act and the *ex ante* innocent political agent. The moral costs inherent in such tragic scenarios are (and should be) the objects of extreme regret, or 'tragic remorse' (de Wijze, 2005). And, as standard DH theorists suggest, these emotions are not only central to our moral experience of the world. They also constitute the appropriate way of responding to one's DH. Nonetheless, Walzer additionally suggests that, in the context of democratic politics, the DH politician must also reveal his anguish and dirt to the community, which not only wants a record of his feelings but it also exists to inflict expiatory punishment. For despite the inescapable nature of the DH problem, the standard DH thesis also suggests that being governed by men who lost their innocence and soul is not desirable. Hence, Walzer et al leave considerable room for the hope that ordinary and political morality might not be irreconcilable after all: the revelation and punishment of one's dirty acts could lead to the restoration of one's innocence and seemingly close the gap between ordinary and political morality.

This puzzling conviction makes one wonder whether the conventional conceptualization of DH as outlined in this chapter is adequate. Indeed, as I briefly suggested here,

Walzer's hopeful claim that innocence could (and should) be regained, seems to reveal that the standard DH thesis and the view of innocence have much more in common than initially admitted. To put it differently, despite its *prima facie* Machiavellian affiliations, the standard DH thesis seems to displace and misrepresent Machiavelli's insights on political morality, DH and conflict. It also collapses into the very idealism it seeks to evade. It is to the development of this point I want to turn in the next chapter.

## 4. A Critique of the Standard DH Thesis

*When a philosopher “solves” an ethical problem for one, one feels as if one had asked for a subway token and been given a passenger ticket valid for the first interplanetary passenger-carrying spaceship instead.*

H. Putnam<sup>58</sup>

*Here is the moral politician: it is by his dirty hands that we know him. If he were a moral man and nothing else, his hands would not be dirty; if he were a politician and nothing else, he would pretend that they were clean.*

M. Walzer<sup>59</sup>

*It is necessary to a prince...to learn how not to be good.*

N. Machiavelli<sup>60</sup>

### 4.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I provided an outline of the standard DH thesis, which is mostly owed to Michael Walzer (1973; 1977). In so doing, I sought to explain how that thesis provides an advance on the way we think about political morality *vis-à-vis* the hopeful insights of the view of innocence. The core insights and implications of the standard DH thesis, its proponents assure us, are quite perspicuous. The standard DH thesis acknowledges that in certain tragic circumstances politicians may face *a paradox of action*: situations whereby an innocent course of action is unfeasible. In a similar vein to Hilary Putnam’s remark in the title quote, standard DH theorists suggest that the vision of harmony and innocence - especially in its Utilitarian or Kantian variant - is unsatisfactorily idealistic: its value

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<sup>58</sup> *How not to solve moral problems*, 179

<sup>59</sup> *Political Action: The problem of Dirty Hands*, 168

<sup>60</sup> *The Prince*, 61

monism does justice neither to the practical demands of our messy morality nor to the realities of political action.

On the face of it, the standard DH thesis has a strong Machiavellian flavour: it purports to take the complex nature of politics more seriously; it *prima facie* acknowledges that morality and politics are uneasy bedfellows. But, in the previous chapter, I also registered a doubt as to whether the standard DH thesis is satisfactory - or, indeed so very different from the view of innocence. For, (at least) one feature of that thesis immediately strikes us as odd. Walzer (1973) and Steve de Wijze (2012) are in agreement with proponents of innocence in this much: the loss of innocence is intolerable and should be, somehow, resisted. In connection to this, Walzer presents us with an image of the moral politician: the agent who is “good for politics” but not “good enough” (1973: 168) and embodies the morally appropriate way of responding to the problem of DH in the context of democratic politics. Hence, standard DH theorists surprisingly tell us, innocence might not be irretrievably lost. Nor, by implication, need we lose hope in the possibility of sanitizing political life: a solution to the conflict between morality and politics *could* and *should* exist. Granted that such a solution may be an imperfect one - Walzer recognizes that by punishing the DH politician we “get our own hands dirty” (1973: 180) - but it does seem to be a solution nonetheless. If this is the case though, Putnam’s cautionary remark does not just apply to the view of innocence; it also penetrates the ranks of the standard DH thesis. To put it bluntly, something is amiss with the prevalent way of thinking about the problem of DH.

It is to the pursuit of this suggestion I want to turn in this chapter. In short, my general argument here is this: there are problems with the conventional DH thesis. Despite its purported capability to capture the complexity of our moral reality, the standard DH thesis fails to do so. What shall emerge from this chapter then is that we need to reconsider *what it means to have DH in relation to certain on-going activities such as politics*. To be clear, I do not wish to deny that (some of) the insights of the standard DH thesis - the Machiavellian

recognition that politics and ordinary morality are difficult to harmonize - better capture the fragmented nature of morality and the complexity of politics than the view of innocence. But, at the same time, it is precisely because these insights are more sophisticated *vis-à-vis* those of the view of innocence, that the point I want to pursue here is so striking: that, despite its purported Machiavellian affiliations, the standard DH thesis fails to take Machiavelli's insights seriously - it collapses into the very idealism it seeks to evade<sup>61</sup>.

The discussion is advanced in three sections, each of which contributes to the general worry I wish to register about the standard DH thesis. In the first section, I want to set the context for the subsequent discussion. In so doing, I shall turn to an aspect of Walzer's Catholic account which has invited considerable criticism from more contemporary DH theorists: the question of the scope of the problem. I will suggest that the problem these theorists identify - the narrowness of Walzer's account - is, in some sense, beside the point. For, what is at issue in that debate is Walzer's location of DH exclusively within the domain of politics, *not* the conceptual structure of the problem (which is what concerns me). So, whilst DH theorists have expended a lot of energy squabbling amongst themselves over the scope of DH, they are all, in some sense, missing the point: the orthodox conception of DH in politics, narrow or otherwise, does not suffice: it is unsatisfactorily 'static'<sup>62</sup>. The upshot of this is that the static account misconceives *the extent of the conflict between morality and politics*. As I shall demonstrate, the problem of DH, if situated in the real context of certain

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61 I should emphasize that the argument I shall advance here also suggests that there exists a neglected rift in the DH tradition. For, as I shall explain in this chapter, in contrast to the static and idealistic account of political morality and DH presented by standard DH theorists (Michael Walzer, Steve de Wijze, Michael Stocker, Tom Goodwin, Christopher Gowans and Anthony Cunningham amongst others) political theorists who can be labelled as DH theorists (such as Stuart Hampshire, Bernard Williams, Sue Mendus, Martin Hollis, and Richard Bellamy) have a different and more nuanced understanding of DH - one which takes Machiavelli's insights on political morality and conflict seriously.

62 I employ the terms 'static', 'snapshotty' and 'episodic' to characterize the standard DH thesis interchangeably.

ongoing activities (most notably politics), is much more enduring and perverse than the static account allows; it also has certain dimensions that are misrepresented by the standard DH thesis. I pursue this argument in the second section. In the third section, I argue that conceptualizing DH as a paradox of action is not enough. For, the static account also mischaracterizes *the nature of the conflict between morality and politics*: it neglects how moral character enters politics and might be responsible for political disaster. In connection to this, I scrutinize Walzer's conception of an *ex ante* innocent, yet *ex post* DH moral politician. I surmise that the politician we are presented with may not be as "good for politics" as proponents of the standard DH thesis like to assume.

#### 4.2. The Question of Scope: Whose DH?

Walzer's Catholic account of DH, I gestured in chapter 3, builds on "the conventional wisdom" that "politicians are a good deal worse, morally worse than the rest of us" (1973: 162). One question which relates to this remark and which has preoccupied theorists working within the DH tradition, concerns the scope of the problem: for which agents does the problem of DH specifically arise<sup>63</sup>? Or, as Stephen Garrett puts it, given that there is a rift between ordinary or private morality and political or public morality, "on whom should we focus an accusing glare"? (1996: 13). A large portion of DH theorists suggest that Walzer's (1973; 1977; 2004a; 2004b) conception of DH is unsatisfactorily narrow: they argue that, like Machiavelli, Walzer unsatisfactorily restricts DH only to political officials (c.f. Gowans, 2001: 228 -232; Parrish, 2007: 13-15; Allett, 2000: 51; Beiner, 2000: 45 -48; Stocker, 2000: 32; Shugarman, 2000b: 236 ; Coady, 2008: 84 -85; 2009: 1; Alexandra,

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63 For instance, this question is raised by Christopher Gowans (2001), Michael Stocker (1990; 2001), Steve de Wijze (1994), Stephen Garrett (1996), Andrew Alexandra (2000), John Parrish (2007) Tony Coady (2000; 2004; 2009), Dennis Thompson (1989), Virginia Held (1989), Ronald Beiner, (2000), Jonathan Allett (2000), David Shugarman (2000b), Gareth Cullity (2007) and David Archard (2007).

2000: 237 -240). In this section, I want to provide a brief outline of this debate. The purpose of so doing is to introduce the more encompassing and deeper philosophical problems which permeate contemporary conceptions of DH. For, as I shall explain, whilst most DH theorists take issue with the exclusive restriction of DH to professional politicians, they overlook crucial conceptual differences between Walzer's and Machiavelli's thought. They also take for granted the validity of Walzer's conception of DH in politics (despite its narrowness). In other words, the broader accounts of DH which emerge from their critiques are, in terms of their conceptual structure, Walzerian still. And, as I shall demonstrate, it is this very conceptual structure which, if judged from Machiavelli's standpoint, is unsatisfactorily idealistic and 'static' - especially if situated in the context of certain ongoing activities, such as politics.

So, the debate surrounding the scope of DH concerns the question of whether it is possible for agents other than public officials to be confronted with, and be morally polluted by, this problem. To put it differently, the question of the scope of the problem has invited two distinct and mutually exclusive answers or theses: a) DH confronts and pollutes *only* political leaders; b) DH is possible in any sphere of life, but is much more *frequent* and *perverse* in politics. In Bernard Williams' frequently cited words, "it is a *predictable* and *probable* hazard of public life that there will be situations in which something morally disagreeable is clearly required" (1978: 62; my emphasis). At first glance, Walzer's account leans towards the second thesis - he initially allows in passing that DH might have a place beyond professional politics (c.f. Walzer, 1973: 174). But, the way Walzer presents the problem - coupled with his more recent (re)formulations of it - suggest otherwise. Or, so his critics argue (c.f. Gowans, 2001; Coady, 2008; 2009; Shugarman, 2000b; Allett, 2000; Garret, 1996).

"There is", Tony Coady pithily remarks, "a strong strand of political exceptionalism inherent in the DH story" (2009: 1). This much also seems to be evident in Walzer's

acknowledgement that the problem of DH refers to whether “those who govern us” can govern well, without losing their innocence: “the sort of actor I am considering”, he tells us, “acts in official capacity” (1973: 161 - 179). Walzer’s restriction of DH to professional politicians is also captured in his remark in the title quote - which advances the vision of the moral *politician* - but is even more explicit in *Just and Unjust Wars*. The crucial question pertinent to DH, Walzer says, is whether “soldiers and statesmen can override the rights of innocent people for the sake of their own political communities” (1977: 254). To which his own answer, as I have mentioned, is affirmative “though not without hesitation and worry” (1977: 254). This worry however, is coupled with the admission that individuals other than political officials should never attack others to aid their self-defence. In other words, absolutist principles should not be overridden by agents other than public officials; whilst ‘in normality’, morality is deontological, in certain tragic circumstances the ‘consequentialism of extremity’ re-imposes itself so that *only* political leaders cannot (and should not) adhere to such a position. Or, as Walzer similarly emphasizes in *Emergency Ethics*, DH applies *only* to “political and military leaders”, who “may sometimes find themselves in situations where they cannot avoid acting immorally” (2004a: 46). Hence, the central claim of the ‘narrow’ view of this problem: “inescapable moral wrongdoing is a common or pervasive feature of political life, but is either nonexistent or of negligible importance in the rest of life” (Gowans, 2001: 229). Whilst certain evil actions are necessary in politics, the privileges of performing them should not be widely distributed. This assertion - which acknowledges that, on certain tragic occasions, the demands of politics are discontinuous from those of ordinary morality or private and social life - is advanced via three interrelated arguments. These, Walzer tells us, constitute the reasons for singling out the politician and not the entrepreneur (1973: 162). In what follows, I want to outline these very briefly. For, it is these arguments which critics of the narrow view tend to target.

First, it is typically thought that in politics it is necessary to deal with evil competitors and institutions. As Walzer indicates, “even if moral politicians would like to act differ-

ently”, and avoid getting DH, “they probably cannot” (1973: 163). Whilst some actions are categorically wrong, the overabundance of evil individuals in politics entails that “they may have to be contemplated in order to protect the rights and welfare of the many” (Cullity, 2007: 57). This brings us to the second reason for thinking that DH may be reserved for political leaders: the state monopolizes the ‘right’ to use coercion. In Max Weber’s words, the ‘vocation’ of politics requires politicians to let themselves in “for the diabolic forces lurking in all violence” (1946: 125; also cited in Walzer, 1973: 176 -177). As Walzer adds, on certain tragic occasions, political victory deems violence necessary, “not only against foreign nations in our defence but also against us ... for our greater good” (1973: 162). Unlike private or ordinary moral action, the demands of political action are such that those who govern us “should become killers” (Walzer, 1973: 162). The representative nature of democratic politics brings to the fore the third reason why the narrow view so compellingly grips us: this lies in the argument stipulating the greater importance we assign to claims of political responsibility (Bellamy, 2010; 2011). As suggested, it is only in politics that the stakes are so high that overwhelming consequentialist considerations should, on certain tragic occasions, override deontological constraints (Nagel, 1978; Walzer, 1973; 2004a). The latter, whilst appropriate for private individuals, cannot always serve as a guide in politics, where vital interests of large numbers of people are at stake; a deontological or absolutist morality is incapable of accommodating the exigencies of politics: it leads to inactivity, compromising the very values it professes to serve.

Walzer’s restriction of DH to professional politics has puzzled a number of philosophers working within the DH tradition. It has also attracted considerable criticism. As Michael Stocker puts it:

[Cases of DH], it might be remarked, all involve political, or at least institutional and public immoralities ... DH are morally peculiar because they involve politics and, indeed, that they are morally peculiar in just the ways politics are... As Walzer reminds us, Machiavelli argued that

rulers must learn how not to be good, and Hoerderer, in Sartre's play, holds that it is not possible to govern both well and innocently ... However, the non-political, including the personal, also allows for dirty hands (2000: 32).

Critics of the narrow account of DH suggest that, whilst the above arguments do signify that there is something special about politics, they do not decisively rule out the possibility of DH outside this domain. In other words, proponents of the narrow view seem to be rather complacent in the acceptance of the reasons which supposedly restrict DH only within the domain of professional politics (Coady, 1993; 2004; 2008). For, as Christopher Gowans (2001) and Steve de Wijze (1994; 2002) suggest, if the DH dilemma stems from one's encounter with evil, it seems absurd to hold that only politicians are confronted by such evil 'forces'. In addition, if the confrontation with evil is possible outside the domain of professional politics, then the prospect of moral wrongdoing and the loss of innocence may, in some circumstances, be also inescapable in private life or ordinary morality. There is no shortage of examples in the DH literature illustrating this point<sup>64</sup>. For instance, de Wijze and Goodwin draw on Williams' (1973a) *Jim and the Indians*: "an individual with no political role is given the unenviable choice of either killing one innocent person to let nine others free, or to refuse and condemn all ten to death" (2009: 531). Here, they say, "we have a DH

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<sup>64</sup> Due to space limitations, I shall not discuss all of these examples. But, it is worth noting here that, this way of upsetting the narrow thesis is also utilized by Stocker (2000), Gowans (2001), Beiner (2000) and Allett (2000). For instance, Stocker (1990) draws on Styron's *Sophie's Choice* - the eponymous heroine's tragic dilemma of being forced by a Nazi doctor to choose between saving one of her children or letting both to be killed. Gowans discusses Captain Vere's dilemma in Melville's *Billy Budd*. Beiner (2000) draws on O'Brien's *To Katanga and Back* and shows how the missionaries' cause to feed the population of Congo could only be achieved by cooperating with an army of mercenaries who provided protection by spreading terror. For Beiner this story illustrates that "it is at least worth asking whether dirty hands are as unique to 'official' political actors" (2000: 6). Finally, Allett (2000) advances this point by drawing on Bernard Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession* and *Major Barbara*.

scenario”: Jim’s case meets all the arguments forwarded by those who quarantine DH in professional politics. Not only does he deal with evil persons but he is also forced to violate the absolutist constraints that purportedly hold in private life or ordinary morality; and like Walzer’s politician, Jim “ought to feel ‘tragic-remorse’” (2009: 531). Hence, “it is important not to slip into a commonly held error” that only professional politicians face the problem of DH (de Wijze & Goodwin, 2009: 531). It is, they say, possible for agents - occupying no political office - to find themselves directly confronted with a stark paradox of action and the prospect of inescapable wrongdoing<sup>65</sup>.

Thus far I have sought to outline a critique of Walzer’s Catholic account which has been commonly advanced by more contemporary DH theorists: that Walzer’s restriction of DH only to professional politicians is unwarranted. What I want to emphasize here though, is that critics of the narrow view say nothing on the validity of the standard DH thesis. In fact, most such critiques do not depart from the standard Walzerian conceptual scheme of DH at all. This much was also gestured in the previous chapter: contemporary DH theorists such as Stocker (2000), de Wijze (1994; 2002; 2008), Cunningham (1992) and Gowans (2001) follow Walzer in framing DH as a single and momentary conflict between two impossible ‘oughts’ or reasons for action. The problem these theorists identify - the narrowness of the Walzerian conception of DH - has little to do with the conceptual structure of the problem. What is disputed is Walzer’s exclusive location of the DH problem within the domain of politics - *not* the extent to which the standard DH thesis adequately captures Machiavelli’s insights *nor*, by implication, the extent to which the orthodox conception of DH suffices. The Walzerian conceptual structure of this problem (and its affinities with Machiavel-

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65 Whilst I do not share de Wijze’s and Goodwin’s predicament that Jim should unequivocally pick the act that yields the ‘lesser evil’ in consequentialist terms (I elaborate on this in chapter 5), this need not deny that: i) moral tragedy cannot occur outside politics and ii) whatever Jim does will carry a moral remainder.

li's thought) is, more or less, taken for granted and then applied beyond the realm of politics.

So, the problem I documented in the introduction of this chapter remains. Whilst de Wijze et al disagree with Walzer on the question of scope, the standard interpretation of DH as a momentous paradox of action- coupled with the image of the moral politician that emerges from their critique - remain unscathed: a solution to the problem *should* and *does* exist. But I am not convinced - neither of the adequacy of the standard DH thesis (narrow or otherwise) nor of the image of the *ex ante* innocent, yet *ex post* dirty politician which emerges from it. To be clear, I do not wish to deny either the possibility or the philosophical coherence of tragic dilemmas. My focus here is rather different: I contend that if there is something special about politics as DH theorists acknowledge, then the orthodox way of thinking about DH in this context does not suffice. The conception of DH as a momentous tragic dilemma fails to capture certain elements which deem politics special. And, despite its purported Machiavellian affiliations, the standard DH thesis is much more closely aligned to the idealistic vision it seeks to evade.

I am therefore committed to two distinct, yet interlinked tasks - each of which questions whether the standard DH thesis adequately captures *what it means to have DH in politics*. The first is to scrutinize the conceptual structure of the traditional DH perspective. I want to suggest that the conventional DH thesis, despite its surface appeal, makes little sense if situated in the real context of certain on-going activities, such as politics. To put it simply, the DH thesis is unsatisfactorily 'static' or 'snapshotty': it misconceives *the extent of the rupture between morality and politics*. The second task is to suggest that interpreting DH solely as a paradox of action is not enough. For, this interpretation cannot fully capture *the nature of the rupture between morality and politics*. To be more specific, I shall argue that the standard DH thesis seems to be oblivious to the way in which moral character - in particular, innocence as a disposition - enters politics and jeopardizes political existence.

For, innocence as a disposition can bring about political disaster without one necessarily being confronted with a paradox of action; and it may persist even after one's hands have been dirtied in the traditional way. I defer the latter task for the time being and turn immediately to the former.

### **4.3. The Standard DH Thesis as 'Static'**

In *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, Isaiah Berlin observes that a large portion of utopian political thought against which Machiavelli (amongst others) sounded the clarion call, is characterized by a vulgar theme:

Once upon a time there was a perfect state, then some enormous disaster took place ... the pristine unity is shivered and the rest of human history is a continuous attempt to piece together the fragments in order to restore serenity, so that the perfect state can be realized again (1990: 23)

Needless to say, the sting of Berlin's charge was not directed against the standard DH thesis. Yet, the contemporary conceptual structure of the problem - Walzer's encapsulation of the conflict between morality and politics as a tension between 'the consequentialism of extremity' and 'the deontology of normality'- suggests that this is a theme which runs formidably through its veins. So, too, do the allusions, popular amongst orthodox DH theorists, to 'innocence lost': recall that the departing assumption of the standard DH thesis is an innocent man who, once confronted with a paradox of action is no longer innocent. Even more telling is Walzer's hopeful, albeit puzzling, conviction that:

It is not the case that when [the politician] does bad in order to do good he surrenders himself forever to the demon of politics ... he commits a determinate crime, and he must pay a determinate penalty. When he has done so, his hands will be clean again (1973: 178).

The standard DH thesis assumes that politics and morality are (or should be) in harmony until a stark paradox of action is presented to the agent. A correlative of this is that, whilst the tension between morality and politics is *prima facie* acknowledged - hence the DH problem - such an acknowledgement is ingrained with a 'static' quality which is also evident in the scenarios DH theorists discuss. In Walzer's original analysis for instance, a political candidate (let us call him Ned) is confronted with two undesirable options: a) make a deal with a dishonest ward boss, "involving the granting of school contracts for the next four years", thereby getting DH for the sake of political success; or b) keep them clean, at the cost of staying out of politics (1973: 165). Similarly, in the TBS, the politician is faced with the prospect of either: a) issuing torture, and betraying his pre-election promises and principles, or b) refusing to torture the terrorist - let the ticking-bomb explode - and violate his political responsibilities<sup>66</sup>. Proponents of the standard DH thesis scrutinize the conflict between morality and politics from a 'snapshot' perspective: by focusing on a single, stark dilemma that confronts the *ex-ante* innocent agent at a specific moment of his life. The crucial question pertinent to the static framework is whether, given some unfortunate circumstances, the action with the best direct effect bears a blameworthy feature and - if it has - whether it is permissible to employ it nonetheless. To be sure, standard DH theorists also suggest that in politics, the DH agent should publically reveal his 'tragic remorse' and dirt so as to regain his innocence through some form of cathartic punishment (though if innocence can indeed be regained through such 'cathartic rituals' there is no reason to restrict the application of them to politics). Regardless of its adequacy though, this *proviso* constitutes yet another testament to the 'static' quality of the orthodox account of the problem: DH involves one's confrontation with a momentary and relatively rare episode - the conflict between morality and politics is a mere anomaly which disrupts the normality of past and future serenity.

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<sup>66</sup> I have discussed both examples in more detail in chapter 3.

Now, I should pause for a moment here so as to emphasize a crucial point - a contradiction perhaps - which already looms large. As I have already indicated, proponents of the standard DH thesis (narrow or otherwise) do acknowledge that there is something morally special about politics. To put it differently, DH theorists do appear to appreciate the non-static nature of political life. For instance, Walzer, de Wijze and Goodwin note that “the dilemma of dirty hands is a central feature of political life that arises not merely as an occasional crisis ... but *systematically* and *frequently*” (Walzer, 1973: 162; de Wijze & Goodwin, 2009: 531; my emphasis). The latter, following Williams, even stress that DH “is a *predictable* and *probable* hazard of public life” (de Wijze & Goodwin, 2009: 531; my emphasis). At the same time however, they assume that all the essential features of DH are discoverable in such ‘static’ choices<sup>67</sup>. So, whilst such remarks do suggest that standard DH theorists are not oblivious to (some of) the issues I want to raise here, those issues are neither sufficiently acknowledged nor incorporated in the way they portray DH in politics - hence the static conception. For anything less than the most superficial consideration of such remarks is bound to reveal that the prevalent conception of DH needs to be drastically amended.

So, my argument here is this: if the problem of DH in politics is *predictable*, *systematic*, *frequent* and *probable*, the static account - the framing of DH as a single, momentous and tragic dilemma - does not suffice: the problem of DH is bound to have certain dimensions that cannot be adequately captured by the snapshot perspective. Taking a cue from Emrys Westacott (2008), I shall suggest that whilst hypothetical or ‘static’ scenarios are often invoked to clarify moral issues - by regularly pointing to how complex moral life can be - they tend to lose the complexity of real life. In advancing this claim, I shall highlight a set of interrelated - and more troubling - ‘symptoms’ which metastasize from the static conception of DH. In short, I argue that: a) the standard DH thesis is too abstract and devoid of the

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<sup>67</sup> De Wijze (1994; 1996) and Stocker (1990) go so far as to propose a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for DH based on this static perspective.

real sociological context; b) it fails to capture certain issues that are related to time, which are special to politics (or the life of politicians) - it is, in short, melodramatic; c) its central insight - the possibility of tragedy and conflict between politics and morality - is ultimately annihilated ; and d) it gives rise to a peculiar, if not inconsistent, view of certain vices. It is to these issues I now turn.

#### *4.3.1. An Ad Hoc Sociological Fantasy*

Confusion, Wittgenstein (1958) tells us, arises when we let ourselves to be seduced by a picture. Whilst simplicity is often seen as a virtue - especially in philosophical inquiry - the complexity of real life is such that we often become bewitched by examples that seem compelling but mischaracterize the world we live in (Luban, 2008). But, in Henry Shue's words, "we cannot simply imagine a tin-opener"<sup>68</sup> (2009: 308). The comfort which the assumption of a tin-opener creates renders philosophical inquiries (far more) abstract and devoid of their sociological context. And, whilst the standard DH thesis purports to capture the complexities and nuances of moral life, such an assumption lurks in the background of most contemporary discussions of DH in general and the paradigm case of DH in particular: the TBS. As Shue suggests, the TBS assumes that:

Whilst torture is rare because restricted to such appropriate cases, the torture is perfectly successful: suddenly someone with no experience or training, who has never tortured anyone before, quickly extracts vital information from someone dedicated to withholding such information (2009: 314).

This, however, is a 'sociological fantasy' - the example we are presented with is underpinned by an impoverished and romanticized conception of real-world interrogations. For, whilst

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<sup>68</sup> This refers to an old joke: a physicist and an economist are stranded on a desert with a tin of food. The physicist uses a rock to open the tin. The economist (in the spirit of assuming full information) says: 'let's imagine a tin-opener'.

the TBS assumes a single, *ad hoc* dilemma about whether or not to torture, by public officials who would *only* resort to the issuance of torture in a desperate emergency, the real world of interrogations “is a world of practices, not of ad hoc emergency measures” (Luban, 2005: 1445). As Shue explains “we have abstracted from the social basis necessary for the practice of torture. For torture is a practice. Practitioners who do not practice will not be very good at what they do”<sup>69</sup> (2006: 237 - 238). In short, TBS discussions focus on the public official’s choice in abstraction from the real social and political context within which that choice – to issue torture or not - should be made.

Needless to say, this recognition does not eliminate the possibility of TBS<sup>70</sup>. Nor does it have to deny that a moral remainder in such instances does exist<sup>71</sup>. It does, however, suggest that the static account is paradoxically oblivious to Machiavelli’s infamous message when it comes to the practice of torture - that virtuous engagement in certain on-going activities necessitates not just the *exhibition* of certain vices but also their *cultivation*. I reserve extending this insight to political practice for now (I elaborate on this point in section 4 of this chapter and in chapter 5). What I want to emphasize here though, is that Shue’s acknowledgement that “torture takes skill, disposition and knowledge gained only from experience” (2009: 314) alters the structure of the DH dilemma. For if the dangers of instilling an official “culture of torture” deem “the legalization of torture ... a bad mistake”, as de Wijze (2006: 314) stresses, but the possibility of the TBS remains, then maintaining the ar-

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69 The notion of practice should be highlighted here as it forms a key premise of the dynamic account of DH I develop in chapter 5.

70 For instance, the recent case in Belgium of Marc Dutroux, a psychopath who was convicted of rape and murder comes close to the situation depicted by the TBS. While serving a prison sentence, Dutroux allowed two young girls that he had abducted to starve to death in a hidden room. The police had been tipped off that Dutroux was responsible for the abductions but failed to find the girls when they searched his house. See de Wijze (2006).

71 This is Luban’s (2005; 2008) and Shue’s (2006; 2009) recent position. Whilst discussing this, de Wijze (2006) takes issue with their absolutism but ignores the sociological implications of their analysis and restates the standard DH thesis.

gument for DH in this scenario requires, at least, this much: a covert cadre of trained torturers to ensure that the possibility of ‘doing wrong in order to do right’ remains open when, and if, needed. This, however, seems to suggest that the conception of DH as a momentary dilemma does not suffice; it reveals the existence of a second-order DH dilemma previously unaccounted for: if a cadre of professional torturers is necessary but must not be made public, then the requirements of secrecy imply that the politician must get DH (at least) once more.

#### *4.3.2. An Ad Hoc Melodrama*

This brings to the fore an aspect of DH that static analyses struggle to confront: politics - democratic or otherwise - is a career for relatively long periods; and, throughout her or his career, a politician faces more than just one DH dilemma. But, as Janos Kis (2008) observes, the repetition of DH situations raises questions of a rather different kind. If DH does not constitute a momentary episode, it is bound to have certain implications that inescapably unfold over time but are nevertheless distorted by static analyses. One such issue concerns the contention that politicians are (and should be) crushed by ‘tragic remorse’, “the appropriate way of characterising the moral emotion that arises from getting DHs” (de Wijze & Goodwin, 2009: 537).

As Judith Shklar eloquently points out, whilst this image appeals “to those engaged intellectuals who like to think of ‘dirty hands’ as a peculiarly shaking, personal and spectacular crisis”, it is “a fantasy quite appropriate to the imaginary world” (1984: 243). To be sure, this recognition need not emerge only from the cracks of the TBS; it can be illustrated by examining less drastic cases of DH, such as Ned’s case<sup>72</sup>. Recall that Walzer is adamant that Ned must get DH. As he puts it:

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<sup>72</sup> Ned’s example, I should add, does not constitute a ‘supreme emergency’ - which, in Walzer’s (2004) and de Wijze’s (2009) more recent analyses, is synonymous to DH.

If the candidate didn't want to get his hands dirty, he should have stayed at home; if he can't stand the heat, he should get out of the kitchen. His decision to run was a commitment to try to win, that is, to do within rational limits whatever is necessary to win (1973: 165).

Up to this point, Ned's dilemma roughly resembles Jim's: both individuals are confronted with a single DH scenario and the prospect of inescapable wrongdoing. The purportedly universally experienced emotion of 'tragic remorse' already seems to be extravagant. However, if Ned's case is scrutinized *only* through this 'static' perspective, we have no particular reason to dispute its plausibility. Or, so it would seem. But, in Ned's case we might well want to ask this: suppose that Ned does win the election. Then what? Walzer et al do not say<sup>73</sup>. In the context of real political life though, it is almost certain that Ned will face new hard questions, most of which could be represented as second-order 'static' DH dilemmas. Should he keep his promise to grant the contracts to the ward boss? Should he make a similar deal when the next election approaches?

As the adage goes, the same thing repeated many times is not the same thing - Heraclitus tells us that things cannot stand still (Plato, *Cratylus*). Assuming that it is unproblematic for an *ex ante* innocent politician to enter politics in the first place (Machiavelli's infamous message and the logical extension of Shue's argument to politics already suggest otherwise) the first DH act interferes with a history of clean hands; the distance between Ned's clean moral record before and after he gets DH for the first time (that is before and after he strikes the deal) is immense. But, the distance between his moral record before and after he gets DH for a second time is considerably smaller. Besides, Ned lost his innocence before this second-order DH dilemma obtained. Hence, as time goes by, the marginal loss caused by the successive DH decisions diminishes and the DH politician moves even further

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<sup>73</sup> They do however contend that Ned should publically reveal his DH. I examine this claim in the next subsection.

away from what he was before the first act of DH (Kis, 2008). On the other hand, the costs of refusing to carry out the DH act are likely to increase with time. For, in his first electoral campaign Ned “has no office to lose. Next time he has” (Kis, 2008: 198). This marginal (moral) cost would rise even if Ned were to seek office and power for the sake of promoting good ends, rather than anything else (I elaborate on this issue in the next subsection). In short, “while the marginal loss from acting with DH is likely to diminish over time, the marginal cost of keeping one’s hands clean are likely to increase” (Kis, 2008: 199).

*Pace* Walzer et al, it should come as no surprise that Machiavelli has little to say about the inwardness of the politician (see chapter 3). For, given the recognition that DH is far from being a momentary episode, to think of the politician as a tragic hero who suffers more and more, as he sinks deeper into the dreary domain of politics seems melodramatic, to say the least. It is more plausible to see him as becoming accustomed to his dirt. And, we have no reason to expect this pathos even after the first DH dilemma obtains. For, this is the reaction of an innocent individual thrown to the messy world of politics not of an experienced politician. I shall elaborate on this point in the next section, but it is worth mentioning here that this is the lesson Sartre’s Hoerderer (whose remarks are, like Machiavelli’s, frequently cited by standard DH theorists but superficially acknowledged) forces upon us. Hoerderer, the embodiment of experience, is comfortable with his dirt - Hugo’s obsessiveness with purity is naïve. For, as Hoerderer tells us, in politics ‘one lies when one must’<sup>74</sup> (1955: 223 - 224).

One may retort that these second-order DH dilemmas (and their implications) do not obtain. For, the standard DH thesis appears to resist them: the democratic DH politician should, soon after the first dilemma is posed, publically reveal his DH so as to regain his

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<sup>74</sup> There is an irony here: the play from which the standard DH thesis takes its name makes no mention of tragic remorse. For Sartre, politics is an on-going activity and DH is enduring. Indeed, standard DH theorists’ description of the moral politician is closer to Hugo rather than Hoerderer. I say more on this on chapter 7.

innocence through some form of cathartic punishment. This point, as I have suggested, forms part of Walzer's suggestion that the acceptance of punishment sustains the hope of salvation: it might enable the politician to regain his innocence. This, Walzer tells us, is "what the Catholic Church has always taught" (1973: 167 - 168). But, as I have already indicated, this *proviso* succumbs to even further difficulties.

#### *4.3.3. Innocence Restored? From Pluralism and Conflict to Monism and Harmony*

Central to the Catholic account is a paradoxical note of optimism: the hope of salvation. Recall Walzer's emphatic claim that "it is not the case that when [the politician] does bad in order to do good he surrenders himself forever to the demon of politics"; he "commits a determinate crime, and he must pay a determinate penalty. When he has done so, his hands will be clean again" (1973: 178). The static account, whilst *prima face* acknowledging tragedy and conflict - hence the melodrama - leaves room for the hope of moving beyond them. This puzzling contention brings to mind Berlin's remark on Marxist political thought and its view of conflict: "some nineteenth-century thinkers thought that [the quest for harmony] is not so simple ... Yet, after inevitable setbacks, failures, relapses, returns to barbarism ... the drama would have a happy ending" (1990a: 13). The similarities between the standard DH thesis and the Marxist view of conflict are profound: after all the drama has taken place, once the acts of revelation and punishment are instilled, the DH politician washes his hands clean. Innocence need not be irretrievably lost: a happy ending for the momentarily dirty politician might exist.

This is a crucial point - it gives rise to a contradiction which needs to be better highlighted: whilst the Catholic account *seems* to embrace a Machiavellian view of morality, it finally lapses back into the very idealism it seeks to evade. In Walzer's final synthesis, harmony could be re-established: politics and morality, despite being momentarily disrupted are not ultimately incombustible. The standard DH thesis seems to oscillate from a purport-

edly value-pluralist perspective to a value-monist one<sup>75</sup>. On the standard account of DH, the transition from temporary conflict to final harmony, from dirt to innocence, seems to be smooth and unproblematic.

What emerges from Walzer's hopeful conviction is a reinstatement (albeit in a slightly different form) of the 'order' against which Machiavelli conveyed the idea that politicians 'must learn how not to be good'. For, as Berlin notes, "Machiavelli conveyed the idea of two incompatible outlooks", each "shaped by values, not means to ends but ultimate ends, ends in themselves" which are "in some profound, irreconcilable ways, not combinable in any final synthesis"<sup>76</sup> (1990a: 10). Whilst this is a striking recognition, it should not surprise us. Walzer's choice of the term 'Catholic' to capture his account of DH is not insignificant. The disavowal of tragedy and conflict is a central tenet of Christian providence (Scott, 1966; Barbour, 1983; Leech, 1963). Christianity ultimately turns evil into good, imperfection into perfection and conflict into harmony. As Karl Jaspers explains, the Christian

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<sup>75</sup> I use the term purportedly here, not just because the standard DH thesis mischaracterizes the extent of the conflict between morality and politics but because it also mischaracterizes the nature of such a conflict. As I explain in the next section here and in chapter 5, pluralism does not merely entail the acceptance of conflict between different action-guiding prescriptions: it also entails the acceptance of a perpetual conflict between at least two entire ways of life, each with its own virtues and standards of excellence.

<sup>76</sup> I should highlight two intertwined issues here. First, whilst Berlin's interpretation of Machiavelli might seem far from canonical, the point here is that whilst the standard DH thesis does appeal to pluralism and conflict it fails to take these into an earnest consideration. Second, as I shall show here and in the next chapters, it is not the case that Berlin's interpretation of Machiavelli cannot cohere with more canonical expositions of the Florentine's thought - those advanced by political realists and DH theorists who do not subscribe to the standard DH thesis (i.e. Martin Hollis, Richard Bellamy, Stuart Hampshire, Mark Philp). This is glimpsed by Philp who writes that the vision that "ethics and politics are effortlessly linked seems a utopian aspiration" (2001: 89). In a similar vein, William Galston, whilst outlining the key features of the tradition of political realism writes that "the basic point and structure of politics creates a qualitatively different set of challenges to which individual morality offers an inadequate guide" (2010: 392).

doctrine of salvation opposes tragic knowledge: “the chance of being saved destroys the tragic sense of being trapped without a chance of escape” (1953: 37- 38). Like most accounts of religious faith, the Catholic account ends up disavowing its acknowledgement of conflict, imperfection and tragedy.

But it is not just that the ‘static’ DH thesis ultimately negates the insight it advances. The final harmony between politics and morality it envisions is hardly conceivable. “Conflict”, Stuart Hampshire disquietingly notes, “is perpetual, why then should we be deceived?” (2000: 51). And in Berlin’s eloquent words:

If we are told that these contradictions will be solved in some perfect world in which all good things can be harmonized ... then we must answer to those who say this, that ... the world in which what we see as incompatible values are not in conflict is a world beyond our ken ... But it is on earth on we live, and it is here we must believe ... The notion of a perfect whole, the ultimate solution, in which all good things coexist seems not merely unattainable - that is truism - but conceptually incoherent (1990a: 13).

The argument I advanced in the previous subsection already grants *prima facie* validity to Hampshire’s and Berlin’s claim - our discussion of Ned’s case revealed that DH is not a momentary ‘episode’. The point I wish to emphasize here builds on this recognition, but its focus is different: it emphasizes the issue of revelation of one’s dirt. For, even if the *specific* dilemmas I have mentioned above do not obtain, Ned’s decision of whether to reveal his DH and subject himself to expiatory punishment cannot be that simple: this question constitutes a second-order DH dilemma in itself and is, therefore, not without a moral remainder.

*Pace* Walzer and de Wijze, Ned’s decision to run for president is not merely “a commitment to try to win” (1973: 165). Gaining office is not in itself the ‘end’ of politics; office demands rule. “What must count as a political activity, anywhere”, Bernard Williams explains, “is *trying to stay in office*” (1978: 59). Williams’ remarks on resignation are sug-

gestive here; as he says, “to view resignation as the mere equivalent of saying ‘I agree’ or ‘I disagree’ in a private and uncoerced conversation” is “an elementary misunderstanding” (1978: 58). Granted that proponents of the standard DH thesis do not talk about resignation (or removal from office) - indeed, they do not discuss what such cathartic rituals might be at all - but, if punishment is to be meaningful, it is difficult to imagine any sanction for the DH politician other than removal from office<sup>77</sup>. If this is the case though, Ned’s decision to publically reveal his DH runs counter to one of the *tele* of politics: the demand to rule. So, at the very minimum, the DH politician is confronted with a second-order DH dilemma: a) either to publically reveal his DH so as to regain his innocence, at the cost of political ostracism or b) marshal on and fulfil his political commitment, at the cost of betraying our demand for innocent politicians again. As Hollis puts it “once a dilemma has been posed for a person in office, integrity does not demand that he keep his hands clean by stepping aside. It is too late for clean hands, whatever he does” (1982: 396). The point here is that Ned’s choice is inescapably bound to be dirty: the conflict between morality and politics does not evaporate as proponents of the Catholic account assume.

To suggest otherwise, Williams tells us, is to neglect the difference “between commitment to *on-going political activity* and a *one-off example of political expression*. It is also to neglect the point that for a politician such a decision is, in a substantial and relevant sense, *part of his life*” (1978: 58). Williams’ remark does not merely imply that standard DH theorists fail to capture Ned’s choice as a second-order DH dilemma. It also reveals the existence of an odd contradiction at the heart of the standard DH thesis - a by-product of the one-off conception of this problem: Why should Ned - just after he enters the political game by becoming dirty for the sake of political success - decide to revert to the mode of ordinary

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<sup>77</sup> Garrett (1996) identifies several possible punishment types, all of which lead to the removal from office: i) resignation ii) electorate retaliation, by either demanding immediate removal from or by not supporting the politician’s re-election campaign; iii) ostracism iv) legal proceedings - such as the Nurnberg trials.

morality - by subjecting himself to punishment (and to the risk of political ostracism) so as to restore his forgone innocence? To put it bluntly, if Ned's objective was to stay away from the enduring dirt of politics, he should not have bothered becoming dirty in the first place; as Truman's motto goes "if he could not stand the heat he should have stayed out of the kitchen". Hence, if Ned's choice is situated within the context of real political life and its demands, the action-guiding prescription Walzer and de Wijze advocate makes little sense. It also gives rise to a rather odd view of certain vices.

#### 4.3.4. *Innocence Restored? A Peculiar and Inconsistent view of the Vices*

The standard DH thesis, whilst purportedly advancing an argument on the necessity of immoral acts (or the practice of vices), grants the permission to behave immorally only in the first-order DH dilemma. Once hands are dirtied, the politician should refrain from engaging in further immoralities; he must not publically "pretend that his hands are clean" and thereby conceal his dirt from us (Walzer, 1973: 168). This, however, seems awkward. The static account suddenly appears to be censorious over the practice of hypocrisy and dissimulation - or, at least, of some manifestations of these: the pretence of clean hands and the art of concealing one's vices or previous DH acts<sup>78</sup>. To be sure, adherents of the orthodox DH thesis are not alone in abhorring hypocrisy and deception. But a Kantian's opposition towards such vices would not strike us as odd - this is to be expected. For those who endorse the practise of almost every vice - including the advocacy of cruelty in scenarios such as the TBS - this seems to be *prima facie* inconsistent. One has reason to wonder whether for an

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<sup>78</sup> This point, I should add here, also connects to the argument I advance in the next section: the static DH thesis fails to take into account the virtues conducive to a virtuous political life. In short, the standard DH thesis ignores that the conflict between morality and politics cuts deeper than a mere incompatibility of action guiding prescriptions. The upshot of this, as I explain, is that the politician the standard DH thesis presents us with is too innocent for politics. I say more on why the innocent are incapable of hypocrisy (or, at least, the hypocrisy advocated by Machiavelli) in chapter 6.

account which purportedly advances a ‘lesser evil’ argument, the practice of cruelty constitutes a ‘lesser evil’ *vis-à-vis* hypocrisy and dissimulation.

And, irrespective of whether cruelty is a lesser vice *vis-à-vis* hypocrisy and dissimulation<sup>79</sup>, the contradiction I previously highlighted remains: the revelation of one’s dirt may well jeopardize one’s on-going political commitment. Democratic politics, Kis reminds us, involves a continuous struggle for power; “politicians know that their public statements are used in that context” (2008:199). A sincere revelation of their DH “may be misused against them” (Kis, 2008: 199). This insight is advanced by DH theorists who stay faithful to Machiavelli’s teachings. In politics, Hollis says, “the extent of the dirt is hard for us to gauge because our agent’s (political) duty is to conceal it from us” - “if we know”, the politician “has failed”. Hence, “a wise prince ... preserves a moral front by seeming to keep faith and seeming to act with honour, while secretly breaking faith and ignoring honour when occasion demands” (Hollis, 1982: 389; 396). Machiavelli’s message is clear: the politician must get his hands dirty once more; he must conceal his past DH acts and appear before us as an innocent man - he must wear clean gloves (Bellamy, 2010). *Pace* Walzer, no politician who takes the claims of politics seriously and who wants to sustain his tenure can allow himself to speak about his DH without paying attention to the strategic aspect of his statements. In short, the standard DH thesis not only underestimates the necessity of such vices (or dirty acts) but it also undermines the possibility of political failure stemming from the revelation of one’s DH - it overlooks how the uncritical pursuit of honesty may interfere with ongoing political commitment.

I shall elaborate on the necessity of hypocrisy (and how the vice of hypocrisy constitutes the ‘glue’ that holds together a virtuous life of politics) in chapters 5 and 6, but I want to press this point more here. I want to turn to a case discussed by Walzer (1977), which supposedly demonstrates the practical currency of the Catholic account: the Allied

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<sup>79</sup> I say more on this point in chapter 6.

terror bombings during WWII and the subsequent dishonouring of Harris, the British Commander who led the operations. This, Alex Bellamy tells us, is the *sine qua non* of DH reasoning “and a small forest has been lost to articles on this subject” (2009: 546). To cut a long story short, the first-order DH dilemma which confronted the British involved a choice of either: a) terror bombing the German cities at the cost of annihilating non-combatants or b) refuse to do so at the cost of possible defeat. As Walzer suggests, the decision to opt for (a) was justified, yet wrongful: whilst the Allies were “face-to-face not merely with defeat but with defeat likely to bring disaster to the political community ... terror bombing is a criminal activity” (1977: 323). Yet, whilst the British got DH, their refusal to honour Harris constituted a form of atonement - “it re-established a commitment to ... the rights they protect ... the deepest meaning of all assignments of responsibility” (Walzer, 1977: 325). In short, Walzer takes this to be an admission to the public that such acts were dirty.

Now, two questions merit further scrutiny here: Was Harris the only actor with DH in this case? And, if not, why was *only* he dishonoured? In relation to the first question, Walzer does acknowledge the DH of the British government - and Churchill’s: “if blame is to be distributed” he says “Churchill deserves full share” (1977: 324). To be sure, the orders issued to the RAF were clear: in a note to the Minister of War, Churchill remarked that “there is one thing that will bring [Hitler] down ... an absolutely devastating attack by heavy bombers upon the Nazi homeland. We must overwhelm him by these means” (1949: 567). But Walzer’s answer to the second question is less than satisfactory. As he says, “Churchill’s success in disassociating himself from the policy of terror bombing is not of great importance” (Walzer, 1977: 324). *Pace* Walzer, Churchill’s dissociation from such a policy is important in at least this much: it constitutes a testament to the practical inadequacy of the Catholic model. The government did not publically reveal its DH; quite the contrary: it pretended to hold the moral high ground. This mismatch between the government’s intentions and public avowals is reflected in a plethora of evidence (c.f. Parker, 1989; Overy, 2005). Churchill repeatedly declared that “this is a military and not a civilian war”

(Nicolson, 1967: 122). Even after the destruction of Dresden, the government continued to insist that the RAF was not conducting terror attacks. In response to criticism from a Labour MP, Sinclair opined, “we are not wasting time on terror tactics” (Garrett 1996: 119)

Hence, in one of the most discussed cases of DH, the British government, whilst authorizing the killing of non-combatants, publically denied doing so. “The reason why they did this” Bellamy tells us “is straightforward”: the public would not support a campaign of annihilation (2009: 546). This was reflected in various polls conducted during the war; no less than forty- six percent of the population opposed terror bombing (Connelly, 2002). So, the government employed a justificatory strategy based on dissimulation and hypocrisy; they concealed their DH because such acts would not have been endorsed by the people. Admitting the deliberate slaughter of non-combatants would cloud the war’s moral clarity and erode domestic support. The dishonouring of Harris was not, in any way, a form of catharsis. Not only did Harris not publically reveal his dirt to the community according to the dictates of the Catholic account - he breached government confidentiality and defended the terror bombings on utilitarian grounds (Hastings, 1979; Overy, 2005) - but also his open knavery deemed him an ideal scapegoat: the government wore clean gloves.

So far I have sought to suggest that the conventional conception of DH as a single and momentary dilemma which brings about the ephemeral loss of innocence is inadequately static: it misconceives the extent of the conflict between morality and politics and does not sit well with the practical realities of certain on-going activities, most notably politics. In advancing this claim, I highlighted a number of puzzling issues which are entangled with the current ‘episodic’ conception of DH. Not only is the standard DH thesis unsatisfactorily abstract and melodramatic, but it also gives rise to an obscure and counter-intuitive view surrounding the practice of certain vices (or dirty acts as proponents of the standard DH thesis would put it). More importantly, the static account ultimately annihilates the purportedly value-pluralist vision it initially advances; Machiavelli’s (much cited by standard DH theo-

rists) message that one ‘must learn how not to be good’ is ultimately supplanted by a deeply hopeful, yet unsatisfactory, vision of honesty, redemption and harmony.

Now, one possible way to proceed from here is to reinterpret DH as involving a series of paradoxes of action which bring about the loss of innocence. This could make for a more nuanced account of this problem in politics, but it would nonetheless overlook a crucial feature of the snapshot approach which merits more scrutiny: the assumption of an *ex ante* innocent man (which is the starting point of the standard DH thesis). Innocence, Walzer tells us, is tested and tarnished *only* when one is confronted with a paradox of action; it is only when certain tragic circumstances obtain and compel the political agent to act immorally that Machiavelli’s message of ‘learning how not to be good’ materializes. Until then, there are no particular problems with innocence venturing freely in politics (given standard DH theorists’ perception of lost innocence as intolerable we may add that this is also desirable).

But Machiavelli’s frequently cited advice is not that one must merely ‘learn how not to *act* well’. Machiavelli is adamant that ‘one must learn how not to *be* good’. For, moral character displays identity, not merely a spasmodic and sporadic collection of actions. This much also follows by extending Shue’s argument to politics - that ‘static’ analyses ignore that the virtuous engagement in the practice of torture is conditioned upon the *cultivation* of certain vices. In short, the standard DH thesis’ overemphasis on action misrepresents Machiavelli’s infamous message. And this recognition can be explained with reference to the fact that the static DH thesis has inherited from the Enlightenment (in particular, the Kantians and Utilitarians) a non-teleological worldview - the product of the Enlightenment’s rejection of Aristotelian ethics of which Machiavelli’s account on political morality constituted an integral part. I shall say more on this in chapter 5. For now, I want to clarify the way the standard DH thesis displaces Machiavelli’s insights. In what follows, I argue that the static account does not merely misconceive *the extent of the conflict between morality and poli-*

*tics*. It also fails to capture *the precise nature of the conflict*: politics does not require its practitioners to merely act in certain ways which conflict with ordinary morality; an expedient politics also requires its practitioners to cultivate and continuously exhibit certain dispositions which are at odds with an admirable moral life. Differently put, the standard DH thesis fails to acknowledge the way in which moral character enters politics and jeopardizes political existence. To be more specific, I shall suggest that there exists a discrepancy between acting in an abominable manner, as a result of one's confrontation with a paradox of action - so that innocence, conceived as the absence of wrongdoing, is lost - and one's ability to take Machiavelli's advice to heart and learn how not to be good - so that innocence, conceived as a disposition, is irretrievably relinquished. The latter, can result in political failure in ways unanticipated by the standard DH thesis: without necessarily one being confronted with a paradox of action and even after one's hands have been dirtied in the traditional way. In connection to this, I contend that this discrepancy captures a concern which looms in the background of the discussion I have advanced so far: that Walzer's moral politician may not be as good for politics as it is sometimes assumed.

#### **4.4. On *ex ante* Innocence and Walzer's politician: Which Innocence?**

In Shakespeare's *Henry VI*, just after the eponymous character is defeated, Queen Margaret exclaims:

Henry, your sovereign,  
is prisoner to the foe; his state usurp'd  
His realm, a slaughter house, his subjects slain (V. vi, 31 - 33).

What Margaret graphically describes here is a political disaster: the tragic disintegration of Henry's kingdom. For Henry nonetheless, this turn of events seems hard to grasp. Like Walzer's politician, Henry is an innocent man and not worthy of such an end. He enters politics motivated by the ideals of peace and love of his country and his rule constitutes an expression of them: it is altruistic and compassionate. Now, were we to utilize the standard

DH thesis as a means of diagnosing Henry's failure, we would be equally puzzled by his tragedy. Henry's demise is not located in an explicit refusal to get DH in the traditional sense. For, Henry is not confronted with a 'static' DH dilemma- a stark choice between two 'impossible oughts'. Scrutinized through the lens of the standard DH thesis, Henry's innocence is yet to be tested; his failure is inexplicable. But, as Peter Johnson points out, whilst Henry's "actions do not take the form of explicit choices ... at least in the manner required by the resolution of a specific dilemma" they do "stem from the disposition which characterizes his life" (1993: 245). And it is precisely this disposition - Henry's innocence - which proves fatal for the political community he is supposed to rule; "Henry", Margaret explains "is too full of foolish pity" (V. iv, 80). Henry spreads his compassion evenly across his political relationships: his unconditional trust and generosity towards his enemies is a signal of political infancy and an impaired understanding of politics.

Needless to say, this insight has an intense Machiavellian flavour: innocent intentions fail because they neglect the realities of power. It also signifies a disharmony between morality and politics which remains elusive for the standard DH thesis: the incongruence between the two does not involve a mere incompatibility of action but, as Machiavelli's motto suggests, it cuts much deeper: it involves an incompatibility of character. When Warwick accuses Henry of being capable neither of 'shrouding himself from his enemies' nor of 'recognizing the secret treasons of the world', the sting of his accusation is not directed against Henry's unwillingness to act in a particular way in a situation of extremity but against his character which constitutes an expression of his actions in normality (IV. iii, 34 - 38). Henry points out that as a child he was innocent of such matters and thus cannot be held responsible: "When I was crown'd I was but nine months old" (I. i, 110 - 111). Richard, who sees the irony of his remark, drives Machiavelli's message home even more forcefully: "You are old enough now ... yet, methinks, you lose" (I. i, 112 - 113). Henry has reached an age and a position where innocence is a culpable deficiency.

This is clear in the two main occasions of collision between Henry's character and politics. First, Henry unnaturally gives up the succession to York. "The events which follow this", Johnson suggests, "have the same logic which governs the consequences of a mistake in a chess game" (1993: 193). Henry alienates his supporters, betrays his oath and unleashes the forces which bring about a devastating war. The pivotal connection between the dissolution of order and the outbreak of civil war is traced to Henry's 'easy-melting' character: his unwillingness 'to learn how not to be good' is directly translated into political ineffectiveness. As the pace of events increases, so does Henry's unwillingness and ineffectiveness. These culminate to the second notable expression of his innocence: his decision to withdraw from politics. As Henry says:

I may conquer Fortune's spite  
By living low, where fortune cannot hurt me...  
Although my head still wear the crown ....  
I myself will lead a private life (IV.vi, 19 - 44).

Whilst Henry's innocence finds initial expression in the creation of havoc, it then prompts nostalgia and guarantees his political isolation. Henry fails to realize that withdrawal from politics is not open to him. A crucial "aspect of his innocence", Johnson points out, "is his belief that he can easily divest himself from public office" (1993: 196). Henry's "attempt to escape politics for reasons of scruple leaves him naked in the face of predatory assaults" (Johnson, 1993: 196) and precedes his assassination - the final reward for his innocence.

It is important to elucidate more clearly here the crucial insight of Shakespeare's play which is, nonetheless, overlooked by the orthodox way of thinking about DH. The contention advanced by the standard DH thesis - that *ex ante* innocence should be *ex post* lost only once one is confronted with a static paradox of action - cannot fully account for what Machiavelli's infamous motto entails: it leaves unexamined how moral character - in particular, innocence as a disposition - constitutes a severe obstacle towards effective political

engagement. For, there exists a discrepancy between innocence, as the absence of wrongdoing - which is lost following one's confrontation with a 'static' choice between two 'impossible oughts' and innocence as a disposition - which is forfeited when one learns how not to be good. In Herbert Morris' words "there is innocent conduct that is simply not wrong" and "there are innocent persons, persons who are absent of a certain kind of knowledge" and experience<sup>80</sup> (1976: 141). Henry's innocence epitomizes the latter: his "ignorance of the mediocries of politics, its conciliations, confrontations and duplicities, of when to trust and when not to places him half in and half out of the political world" (Johnson, 1993: 196 - 197). Innocence, in short, is not merely passive - something which is only acted upon or awaits to be tragically tainted upon one's confrontation with a dilemma, as standard DH theorists maintain. Rather, it has an active sense: it is itself responsible for tragedy and disaster. Differently put, whilst the standard DH thesis *prima facie* challenges the Platonic Ideal with respect to action (it postulates that moral and political action conflict) it maintains the Platonic Ideal with respect to character: it is oblivious to how certain dispositions conducive to an admirable moral life conflict with a virtuous life of politics .

To further clarify the distinction between innocence as a disposition and innocence as the absence of wrongdoing, it might be worth adding that it is not just that moral character may jeopardize political existence in the absence of a 'static' dilemma. Simply put, it is not the case that when one becomes (or is capable of becoming) guilty of wrongdoing he possesses the experience and qualities necessary for virtuous political rule. The discrepancy between *innocence as a disposition* and *innocence as the absence of wrongdoing* is such that the former may persist even after the latter has been lost - that is, after hands are dirtied in the traditional way. "Young children", Morris points out, are often in this condition, for "they are guilty of wrongdoing; indeed they may feel guilty, while still retaining their inno-

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<sup>80</sup> This point is also raised by Stuart Hampshire (1989) and Elizabeth Wolgast (1993).

cence” (1976: 141). To illustrate how this insight applies to politics we might want to look at the character of Brutus in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*.

Despite the bad press he historically had, in Shakespeare’s tragedy Brutus is a noble man: he enters politics to protect the republic from tyranny. In order to do so nonetheless, he must get his hands dirty (in the conventional use of the word): he must join a group of conspirators - led by Cassius - and assassinate his friend, Caesar. The terms of his political engagement are thus severe: they involve the dirty acts of assassination and betrayal. When Brutus contemplates on the path laid before him, he quickly acknowledges that his loyalty to Caesar and his political commitment to the Roman Empire cannot be reconciled:

If that friend asks, why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer:  
Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more (III. ii, 51).

Brutus’ remarks capture the existence of a paradox of action. Despite his nobility, Brutus is not prepared to will the political good only by acting innocently: he is prepared to overcome his scruples and forfeit his innocence - as the absence of wrongdoing - to serve the community. But, does Brutus’ capacity to dirty his hands mean that he learns how not to be good? Does this render Brutus ‘good for politics’ as proponents of the static DH thesis suggest?

Shakespeare’s answer is negative: Brutus’ engagement in (what seems to be) a dirty act is a prelude to political chaos and his own demise. The lesson which Shakespeare forces upon us is *not* how an innocent man overcomes his scruples by engaging in a heinous act, but how moral character can be easily vulnerable to deception<sup>81</sup>. This is implicit in Mark Anthony’s speech in Caesar’s funeral:

Brutus says Ceasar was ambitious,  
And Brutus is an honourable man...  
When the poor have cried, Caesar has wept.

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<sup>81</sup> See Gowans’ (1990) analysis of Brutus dilemma in ‘static’ terms.

Ambition should be made of sterner stuff...  
Three times I presented him a kingly crown,  
Which he three times refused. Was this ambition?  
Oh judgment, you have fled to brutish beasts,  
And men have lost their reason! (III. ii, 56).

Anthony suggests that Brutus has been deceived (at least) once: the momentous dilemma which Brutus *thinks* he was confronted with was a façade: a carefully devised scheme by Cassius to involve him in the conspiracy so as to accumulate political capital from his untarnished reputation. Cassius edited a number of letters supposedly written by the public, which expressed concern for Caesar's rule. In so doing, he convinced Brutus of Caesar's ambitions and of the growing tide of public support for the conspiracy. What is worth emphasizing here is that the disharmony between morality and politics is (once again) not marked by Brutus' dirty act. Rather, it is Brutus' innocent character which compromises his political judgement and disqualifies him from expedient political engagement. "Sincere people are guileless", Clive Lewis tells us, "and those who have no guile themselves are not quick to suspect it in others" (1960: 171). Whilst most of the evidence pointed against the justifiability of such a conspiracy, Brutus' ignorance of politics precludes him from approaching Cassius' plan with caution. His guilelessness deems him an easy prey to deception. What is striking here is that the loss of Brutus' innocence - conceived as the absence of wrongdoing - is the product of his innocent character.

But Brutus' innocence does not evaporate following his engagement in a dirty act. The conflict between moral character and politics remains - it leads to a second instance where the former jeopardizes the latter: Brutus' disastrous misjudgement in allowing Anthony to deliver the above speech at Caesar's funeral. Unlike Cassius, Brutus fails to realize that granting Anthony a rhetorical stand might be a politically risky permission: it reveals his "lack of insight into the motives of those less disinterested than himself, his attenuated political sense, and his patrician assumption that an open, rational account of his conduct is

sufficient to guarantee political success” (Johnson, 1993: 30). Even after Brutus’ hands are sullied and his innocence - as the absence of wrongdoing - is lost, his ignorance of political realities remains unaltered. His language signals a naïve honesty and simplicity uncongenial to the deception and duplicity of his interlocutors:

We will deliver you the cause; Why I, that did love Caesar when I struck him, have thus proceeded? Our reasons are full of good regard; you, Anthony ... should be satisfied ... I will myself into the pulpit first, and show the reason for Caesar’s death. What Anthony shall speak, I will protest he speaks by leave and by permission” (III. i, 55).

This is the conviction of a guileless man, confident of the righteousness of his intentions and acts. Brutus is unaware that others might disagree with him. Nor is he aware that his honesty can be turned against him. His innocence ultimately compels him to turn his back to the community: his belief that his engagement in politics ends with Caesar’s assassination constitutes a prelude to Anthony’s manipulation of the public and Brutus’ ensuing death.

But it is not just that the standard DH thesis is oblivious to the incompatibility of moral character and politics. There is more to be said here. The striking similarities between Walzer’s *ex ante* innocent, yet *ex post* DH politician and Brutus and Henry suggest that it is not just Shakespeare’s tragic heroes who constitute paradigms of innocence as a disposition. Recall that Walzer’s politician enters politics confident that his innocence is sufficient - he “wants to do good only by doing good ... he is certain that he can stop short of the most corrupting and brutal uses of political power” (1973: 168). Once confronted with the messy requirements of politics his immediate reaction is one of ‘tragic remorse’ - akin to an individual who feels struck by an unanticipated misfortune. His goodness and obsession with innocence deems him incapable of hypocrisy and dissimulation - it prompts him to seek solace in a private life of contentment by washing his hands clean through an honest revelation

of his dirt, confident that evading public office is easy and devoid of moral loss and unaware how such acts may be exploited by his opponents.

These sorts of beliefs and reactions are not only politically suicidal (for the reasons I documented earlier). They also constitute a mark of such an individual's ignorance - an expression of innocence. As Williams remarks, since the problem of DH in politics "is everyday part of the business", the politician who wants to take the claims of politics seriously "has to face the probability" of such conflicts (1978: 62). In other words, the politician should "know in advance that politics will produce these sorts of dilemma". For, "in choosing politics", he "has chosen a life which will predictably bring these conflicts with it" (Mendus, 1988: 340 - 343). As Constantine Cavafy tells us:

As one long prepared, and graced with courage  
say goodbye to her, the Alexandria that is leaving ...  
don't degrade yourself with empty hopes like these.  
As one long prepared, and graced with courage ...  
listen with deep emotion, but not  
with the whining, the pleas of a coward ...  
and say goodbye to her, to the Alexandria you are losing. (1992: 33).

Resentment does not make for an erudite reaction to an *expected* course of events; if one is 'long prepared', 'whining' is hardly necessary. But this knowledge is crucially lacking in Walzer's innocent politician; for, it is intertwined with the antithetical disposition of experience. In Hampshire's words, experience involves "the expectation of unavoidable squalor and imperfection, of necessary disappointments and mixed results, of half success and half failure". In short, "a person of experience has come to expect that his usual choice will be the lesser of two or more evils" (1989: 170). An experienced political agent is aware that the realm in which he willingly chose to operate cannot ever be free from conflict. Nor can it ever be clean.

## 4.5. Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I sought to demonstrate that something is amiss with the standard DH thesis. I have argued that, despite its purported Machiavellian affiliations, the standard DH thesis is much more closely aligned to the vision of innocence it seeks to reject. For, the account of political ethics that emerges from the standard DH thesis is unsatisfactorily static and idealistic. In particular, I illustrated that orthodox accounts of DH displace the Machiavellian vision in, at least, two ways. First, the conventional conception of DH underestimates *the extent of the conflict between morality and politics*. Differently put, the standard DH thesis fails to capture the problem of DH (the continuous necessity for immoral actions) in its full magnitude in the context of certain ongoing activities, most notably politics. Machiavelli's vision of perpetual conflict between morality and politics is supplanted by an abstract, melodramatic and hopeful vision of harmony and redemption. This, I have illustrated, is not just unwarranted. It also leads to a counterintuitive view of certain vices: it ignores the importance of hypocrisy and dissimulation and overlooks how the uncritical pursuit of honesty may interfere with, and jeopardize, ongoing political commitment. Second, the orthodox conception of DH as a paradox of action cannot fully capture what Machiavelli's infamous motto of learning how not to be good entails. The standard DH thesis - by virtue of its conception of the incongruence between morality and politics as an ephemeral and rare incompatibility of action-guiding prescriptions - fails to capture *the precise nature of the conflict between morality and politics*: it ignores how certain dispositions of character may enter politics and jeopardize political existence in the absence of a 'static' DH dilemma or even after hands have been dirtied in their traditional way.

The way to proceed from here seems clear enough: if we are to capture DH in all its complexity, we should develop an account of the problem which can help break away from contemporary static accounts. We are, in other words, compelled to develop a 'dynamic'

account of DH so as to capture the problem of DH in all its complexity and restore Machiavelli's lost insights on political morality and conflict. This is the task of the next chapter.

## 5. The Dynamic Account of DH

*I have said nothing here with a view to lessen that infinite distance  
which must ever be between virtue and vice.*

*I would only make my readers comprehend that all political are not all  
moral vices; and that all moral are not political vices.*

Baron de Montesquieu <sup>82</sup>

*Great men are almost always bad men.*

Lord Acton <sup>83</sup>

### 5.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I suggested that the orthodox way of thinking about DH in politics is unsatisfactorily ‘static’ and idealistic: it mischaracterizes both *the extent* and *the precise nature* of the conflict between morality and politics. In connection to this, I demonstrated that despite its purported Machiavellian lineage, the standard DH thesis fails to take Machiavelli’s insights on political ethics seriously. In particular, I argued that Machiavelli advances two intertwined suggestions which are ignored by or, at best, difficult to reconcile with conventional DH approaches: the rupture between morality and politics is: i) much more enduring and ii) much deeper than static accounts allow. For, there exists a discrepancy between *acting* in a morally abominable manner, as a result of one’s confrontation with a paradox of action, so that innocence - as the absence of wrongdoing- is lost - and one’s ability to take Machiavelli’s advice to heart and learn how not to *be* virtuous, so that innocence - as a disposition - is irretrievably relinquished.

Implicit in both points is the suggestion that Machiavelli’s conception of agency and politics is underpinned by an approach that has received little attention by, and remains elusive for, standard DH theorists: a theory of virtues. Yet, as Mark Philp laments, “Machi-

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<sup>82</sup> *The Spirit of Laws*, 19

<sup>83</sup> *Letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton*, 1

avelli makes no attempt to offer a theory of virtues *per se*, as a contribution to an understanding of the good or the good life” (2001: 44). This recognition leaves in its wake a residual problem: how are we now to proceed? Philp (2001) advocates a turn to virtue ethics. This tradition might enable us to develop a framework that grasps DH in all its complexity: it shall help us conceive certain on-going activities, such as politics, on their own terms - these concern “the political virtues and qualities of actors involved” (Philp, 2001: 4). Thus, a turn to virtue ethics might enable us to fill the lacuna left open by Machiavelli, and to effectively retrieve elements that have been long lost from the DH perspective. My overall aim in this chapter is to pursue this suggestion. I will set the foundations of a richer account of DH by locating it within virtue ethics.

Before saying more on how the discussion is advanced however, it is worth stressing a crucial issue I briefly touched on in chapter 2. This concerns the extent to which virtue ethics, both classical and contemporary, can account for moral conflict in the first place. Whilst virtue ethics has received heightened philosophical interest lately, one of the most salient features of this approach is the contention that an action is justified *iff* it is what a virtuous person would do in the circumstances (Athanasoulis, 2010; Hursthouse, 1999; Oakley & Cocking, 2001; Foot, 1978; 1983; Plato, *The Republic*; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*). This claim nonetheless, seems troubling in at least two interrelated ways. First, conventional virtue ethics seems resistant to DH (as traditionally understood) and its insights: the recognition that in certain tragic situations a morally innocent course of action is unfeasible. This much is evident in Rosalind Hursthouse’s (1999) postulation that it is virtuous *tout court* to reveal a harmful truth, because this is what a person with the virtue of honesty would do<sup>84</sup>; “we are not forced”, she stresses, “to say that ‘virtuous agents faced with dilemmas act badly ... They don’t’” (1999: 74). It seems unintel-

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84 Whist elsewhere Hursthouse (1999) seems to embrace a view which comes close to the idea of DH, her account only applies to ‘static’ DH scenarios and does not capture the discrepancy between moral and political virtue.

ligible and contradictory, Hursthouse argues, to entertain the thought that the virtuous individual who lies acts dishonestly or unjustly. In connection to this, most theories of virtue suggest that what is good *qua* human being is indistinguishable from what is good *qua* politician. This, however, is Plato's view on political morality (see chapter 1), not Machiavelli's and, in light of our discussion of Brutus and Henry, it seems less than satisfactory.

On the face of it, conventional theories of virtue are replete with certain assumptions that have been previously deemed less than adequate: the Platonic ideal or the doctrine of final harmony. In short, virtue ethicists' inheritance of Plato's 'unity of virtue thesis' and his denial of moral conflict, poses serious issues which cannot be evaded whilst attempting to situate DH within this philosophical tradition. Yet, the thesis' resistance to such assumptions also justifies this chapter's choice of, and emphasis on Alasdair MacIntyre's neo-Aristotelian framework. Although this may appear as a bold claim, I contend that MacIntyre's thesis, as presented in his earlier works (in particular, in *After Virtue* which preceded his Thomist-Aristotelian turn), resists the Platonic Ideal and can serve as a theoretical premise upon which we can develop a more nuanced account of DH. Indeed, MacIntyre's later repudiation of the suggestion that "the virtues of one ideal character bring about the vices of the other" which implies the development of "an inescapably defective character" (1990: 369), is precisely the claim I shall advance here, and which, I suggest, follows by drawing on his account in *After Virtue*. It is therefore to the development of this point I want to turn here: to the provision of the foundations of a 'dynamic' account of DH by integrating elements of MacIntyre's framework with Machiavelli's conception of politics and political virtue (*virtù*).

My inquiry is organized into three stages. In the first section, I shall outline MacIntyre's 'negative thesis' so as to set the context for the subsequent sections. I illustrate some of the key objections MacIntyre levels against modern philosophy and demonstrate why Aristotle, the protagonist against whom he matches the voices of modern philosophy, is

so crucial to his argument. By examining the implications of MacIntyre's 'negative' thesis, I suggest that his concerns surrounding the status of modern philosophy: i) add new insights to the inadequacy of the standard DH thesis and ii) provide a historical explanation as to why standard DH theorists displace Machiavelli's thought. In the second section, I spell out MacIntyre's 'positive' thesis. In so doing, I suggest that in contrast to conventional theories of virtue, MacIntyre's account allows for moral conflict and tragedy and provides for a richer account of DH (as traditionally conceived). I then utilize elements of his thesis to break away from the contemporary 'static' conception of this problem - its interpretation as a single, rare and momentary tragic episode - in politics. In developing a dynamic account of DH, I conceive politics as a practice and way of life, and draw on Machiavelli's discussion of political agency and *virtù* in order to sketch some of the virtues conducive to virtuous political conduct. As I demonstrate, the richer DH perspective which emerges, acknowledges that virtuous engagement in politics, requires one to become partially vicious and partially virtuous, yet no longer innocent (dynamic DH). That is to say, the problem of DH, understood in dynamic terms, involves a *paradox of character*, not just a *paradox of action*: leading a virtuous political life requires one to *become* partially vicious and no longer innocent.

## 5.2. MacIntyre's Negative Thesis: The Call to Rejuvenate the Virtues

MacIntyre's "profoundly pessimistic" *magnum opus* (Schneewind, 1982: 662) begins with a disquieting suggestion: contemporary philosophical discourse is "in state of grave disorder" (2007: 2). The "most striking feature of such moral utterance" is that it is used to express interminable disagreements<sup>85</sup> (2007: 6). To the naked eye however, the language in which these debates are conducted paradoxically implies that a rational solution to such disagreements *can* and *should* exist; moral discourse appears and claims to be characterized by objectivity, rationality, absolute truth and universal applicability. But our moral

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<sup>85</sup> See also Horton's and Mendus' (1994) introduction in *After MacIntyre*.

concepts are useless, MacIntyre argues. What is more, the extent of this disorder is so immense that we lack the resources to recognize it, much less to extricate ourselves from it. In other words, contemporary philosophy is composed by mere simulacra of morality: a mass of incoherent conceptual fragments that have survived from the past, detached from the wider viewpoint from which they derived their meaning.

The culprit for our current philosophical malaise, MacIntyre suggests, is the 'Enlightenment project' (Kant, Hume and Diderot being its main representatives), and its successors (Bentham's and Mill's utilitarianism for instance). To cut a long story short, MacIntyre argues that the 'Enlightenment project' was both foundationalist and nihilistic- or, that it led to nihilism because of its flawed foundations: its aspiration to discover "an independent, universal and systematic rational justification of morality" (2005: 39). Whilst the *philosophes* agreed on the character of morality, and what a rational justification of morality might be, they could not "agree among themselves either on what the character of rationality is or on the substance of morality to be founded on that rationality" (MacIntyre, 2005: 21). Since those who purported to derive uniquely justifiable moral principles on which rational agents ought to embrace could not secure agreement on the derivation of these from those who espoused their basic philosophical purpose and method, then the entire project failed to deliver its promise. Hence, what Brandon Harnish (2010: 180) calls "rationalism run amok": the failure of the 'Enlightenment project' is partially rooted to an overestimation of the power of reason - or, in reverse, to a failure to acknowledge its limits. But it is not just that the Enlightenment project failed. MacIntyre (2005) suggests that it was doomed to fail since its inception - because of what the *philosophes* took morality to be and what they rejected as philosophically undesirable. In short, the project's miscalculated overestimation of the authority of reason was the product of the repudiation of Aristotelian ethics.

On the face of it, MacIntyre's 'negative thesis' shares much with a theme which I have, following Isaiah Berlin (and Machiavelli), resisted: that once upon a time, there exist-

ed a perfect state which was shivered by a disaster and which must be, somehow, restored. In light of my critique of the standard DH thesis then, MacIntyre's bleak language *prima facie* seems less than satisfactory. And so, too, does his chronology of the disaster. Granted that philosophy is in a state of disorder, MacIntyre's charge does not reach far enough; philosophy seems to have been in such a state long before the Enlightenment project (Berlin, 1990; Hampshire, 1989; Edyvane, 2013). This much also follows from my discussion of the Platonic Ideal: the way in which philosophers approach Dmitri's last torment in *The Brothers Karamazov* - their attempt to specify a tidy and universal morality "to which fully rational agents could not fail to assent" (MacIntyre, 2005: 271) - has been prevalent since Plato's *Republic* (see chapters 1 and 2). Even worse, it also permeates Aristotle's thought, MacIntyre's hero.

This, however, need not render MacIntyre's destructive account unintelligible. For, as I suggest in the next section, MacIntyre's account does seem to accommodate the above concerns. Nor does the admission that Aristotle endorses the Platonic Ideal necessarily render MacIntyre's 'negative thesis' obsolete. Simply put, this recognition does not exonerate the Enlightenment project from MacIntyre's indictment. For post-Enlightenment philosophy *did* lose something of significant value by repudiating Aristotelian ethics. To suggest otherwise would be to overlook the "great contrasts", to use Elizabeth Anscombe's (1958: 1) words, between these approaches. A crucial difference between these approaches is that, for the Aristotle the good life is the life lived in accordance with virtue (*arête*), understood against the background of a teleological conception. For Aristotle, there exists a contrast between 'man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature' (let us call it point B for the sake of simplicity), with 'man-as-he-happens-to-be' (let us call it point A) (MacIntyre, 2005). Hence, for Aristotle the good was functionally defined and the virtues constituted an essential means which enable the transition from point A to point B. Aristotle's *teleological* appeal enabled us to discern which virtues and actions are necessary for the good life, and brought with it the possibility of ethical failure, if one acted in ways which negate his *telos*.

The rejection of Aristotelian *teleology* nonetheless, obliterated the distinction between point A and point B and brought with it a denial that we have any specific purpose beyond what we chose; post-Enlightenment man was no longer governed by a *telos* external to him but merely by the dictates of his own internal reason. In short, post-Enlightenment philosophy evolved into a modern Croesus, neglecting that a reference to a *telos* is necessary to evaluate one's life<sup>86</sup>. The impossibility to discern between 'man-as-he-happens-to-be' and 'man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature', left in its wake "a moral scheme composed by elements whose relationship was unclear" (MacIntyre, 2005: 55). Our understanding of the virtues became deformed: morality degenerated into an incoherent set of abstract principles deprived of the *teleological* background which gave them meaning. The emergent post-Enlightenment self was a criterionless and 'static' chooser, starting at every moment from *tabula rasa* and operating in a vacuum, lacking any social identity and attachments. Thus, in the absence of a *teleological* background, philosophy was premised on 'a view from nowhere', to borrow Nagel's (1986) phrase.

To recap, MacIntyre's 'negative thesis' is underpinned by two crucial features: i) his insistence on the need for a teleology, so as to restore the meaningful distinction between what we are and what we ought to be and ii) his insistence on the social embeddedness of our *telos*. The implications of MacIntyre's charge against modernity are profound. In a vein reminiscent of Bernard Williams' discussion in *Ethics and The Limits of Philosophy*, MacIntyre suggests that post-Enlightenment philosophy is devoid of the resources to deliver one of its promises: it is no longer capable of reflecting adequately on one of the central questions of ethical inquiry - "the question of what sort of person am I to become?" (MacIntyre, 2005: 118). From the post-Enlightenment standpoint, this question is approached only by indirection - it is overshadowed by an otiose obsessiveness with deriving abstract rules and meaningless principles.

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<sup>86</sup> See Herodotus (*The Histories*) and Plutarch (*Nine Greek Lives*).

But MacIntyre's despair does not merely strike at the heart of our prevalent moral theories, such as Kantianism and Utilitarianism (and the covering law of morality). Besides, as we saw, these are also deemed unsatisfactory by proponents of the standard DH thesis. Rather, MacIntyre's indictment is levelled against contemporary philosophy as *a whole* of which the standard DH thesis constitutes an integral part. Simply put, MacIntyre's historical analysis is capable of explaining much of the current status of the standard DH thesis. Recall that, whilst standard DH theorists correctly identify certain problems with Kantianism and Utilitarianism (and the vision of innocence that emerges from them), they do not necessarily *reject* the overall validity and premises of such theories. Walzer's portrayal of DH as a conflict between deontological dictums upheld in ordinary morality and consequentialist imperatives which momentarily re-impose themselves in politics, is suggestive here. Whilst orthodox DH analyses seek to mend some of the insights of post-Enlightenment moral theories - by pointing to the messiness of our moral reality - their discussion of DH proceeds via an *a priori* commitment to the very abstract principles propounded by these theories. In short, whilst DH theorists seek to unsettle the view of innocence by alluding to the existence of plural and conflicting values or 'oughts', these very values are couched on a view from nowhere. Simply put, standard DH theorists too have inherited mere simulacra of morality.

What follows from this, is that standard DH analyses are also bound to be inescapably devoid of the resources to reflect on the question of 'what sort of person should I become'. De Wijze and Goodwin's (2009) discussion of Williams' Jim and the Indians is suggestive of this. To be clear, I do not deny that this example reveals the possibility of moral tragedy outside professional politics. But, to steadfastly contend that Jim *should* pick the act that yields the 'lesser evil' (in consequentialist terms), and murder one of the Indians, is to miss a crucial aspect of Williams' critique of consequentialism. For, it is not just that the consequentialist vision of harmony, and its overconcentration on the question of how one should act, fails to capture the existence of a moral remainder. To wholeheartedly endorse the consequentialist action-guiding prescription, as de Wijze and Goodwin seem to do, is to

neglect that *Jim's* actions have to be seen as the actions “which flow from the projects and attitudes with which *he* is most closely identified. It is thus, in the most literal sense, an attack on *his* integrity” (Williams, 1973a: 116 -117; my emphasis). Simply put, de Wijze and Goodwin’s agent is, to borrow Martin Hollis’ (1985) words, a *philosophical nobody*: an individual who comes to his choices ethically naked. Much like the Utilitarians then, de Wijze and Goodwin comfortably ignore that Jim has a particular history, identity and a sense of *telos* - and that it is *his* particular history, identity and sense of *telos* that shape the pattern of his experiences and inform the choice of his actions.

This point however, becomes particularly profound in contemporary and standard discussions of DH in politics. Recall that, in the previous chapter, I demonstrated that the standard DH thesis is unsatisfactorily ‘static’ and fails to sufficiently capture *what it means to have DH* in the context of certain on-going activities such as politics: it mischaracterizes both *the extent* and *the nature* of the conflict between morality and politics. And, in light of MacIntyre’s account, the deficiencies of the standard DH thesis should come as no surprise. For, what lurks in the background of the static DH thesis and some of the problems which metastasize from this (for instance, the assumption that an individual with no experience in torture suddenly becomes an efficient interrogator or the suspiciously abstract contention that the politician ought to experience tragic remorse and publically reveal his dirt so as to regain his innocence) is the post- Enlightenment portrayal of the self as a ‘static’ chooser, who starts at every moment *de novo*. In short, the standard DH thesis - by virtue of its static nature - fails to fully grasp what it means to *lead a virtuous political life*. This much is also evident in the orthodox interpretation of DH as a mere paradox of action which is oblivious to the way moral character enters politics and jeopardizes political existence. In short, MacIntyre’s ‘negative thesis’ reaffirms, and provides a historical explanation to, my suggestion that Machiavelli’s inception of DH - his recognition that the conflict between morality and politics is much more enduring and cuts deeper than a mere incompatibility of action guiding prescriptions - has been displaced by conventional DH analyses. Put simply, standard

DH theorists' insufficient reflection on the question of 'what sort of person should a politician become' can be explained with reference to the fact that they have inherited a non-teleological worldview from the Enlightenment project - the product of the Enlightenment's rejection of Aristotelian ethics of which Machiavelli's account on political morality constituted an integral part.

MacIntyre's dissatisfaction with modern philosophy echoes the suggestion I made in the introduction of this chapter: to grasp political ethics and the problem of DH in all its complexity, a theory of virtues is necessary. I am therefore committed to two interrelated tasks. The first is to provide an exposition of MacIntyre's 'positive account'. I will illustrate that, in contrast to standard virtue ethics' accounts, MacIntyre's core conception of the virtues allows for moral conflict and tragedy. It also provides for a more nuanced account of DH (as conventionally conceived) as it enables us to resist framing this problem in terms of abstract utilitarian or deontological prescriptions. The second task is to utilize some elements of MacIntyre's positive account and develop a 'dynamic' DH framework that captures the problem of DH in politics in all its complexity and restores Machiavelli's lost insights. I defer the second task for now (this is addressed in section 4 of this chapter), and turn to the first immediately.

### **5.3. MacIntyre's Positive Thesis: Tragedy, Conflict and DH**

MacIntyre's 'negative thesis' urges us to start afresh: to "put Aristotelianism to the question all over again" (2005: 119). The restoration of a teleological approach implies that morality must be primarily understood in terms of the virtues rather than abstract rules. These refer to:

dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve goods internal to practices, but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of the quest for the good, by

enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions ... and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge (2005: 207).

In place of the criterionless modern self which lacks any *telos*, MacIntyre (2005) proposes a narrative conception of the self; in place of the post-Enlightenment's obsession with abstract rules he appeals to practice-based virtues; and, in place of the 'undersocialized' contemporary conceptions of the individual, he turns to traditions. Hence, MacIntyre's account is developed in three phases, each with its own conceptual background: i) practice, ii) narrative unity of human life, iii) moral tradition.

Before scrutinizing these elements though, I should emphasize that whilst MacIntyre's account constitutes an expression of Aristotelian virtue ethics, this label may mislead us for a number of reasons. What demarcates MacIntyre's account from other neo-Aristotelian accounts is that Aristotle is not treated as an individual theorist but as "the representative of a long tradition, someone who articulates what a number of predecessors and successors also articulate with varying degrees of success" (2005: 146). And, as I shall illustrate, MacIntyre's account embodies commitments antithetical to conventional virtue ethics: it contains elements stemming partially from the pre-Aristotelian tradition and from contemporary ideas which share much in common with Berlin's (1990), Stuart Hampshire's (1989) and Bernard Williams' (1981) emphasis on pluralism and moral conflict<sup>87</sup>. This is also acknowledged by William Galston who writes:

Berlin and MacIntyre seem to agree on a number of essential points. Both argue that it is possible to speak of the human good in a way that is not simply arbitrary, subjective or relative. Both insist that the good is radically heterogeneous. There is no Platonic- monistic idea of the Good from which all particular goods can be deduced or through which they

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<sup>87</sup> This point is also made by Alex Bavister-Gould (2008).

can be justified. Nor is there any rational principle for ranking all goods... Genuine goods conflict with one another (1998: 71).

It is these elements I want to emphasize here, whilst outlining MacIntyre's 'positive thesis'. For, it is precisely these elements - MacIntyre's rejection of the Platonic Ideal (the unity of the virtues thesis and Aristotle's metaphysical biology) and his emphasis on a plurality of values, moral conflict and the unity of life as a dramatic narrative - which create the conceptual space to capture the possibility of moral tragedy (or DH as conventionally understood) but also develop a dynamic account of DH in politics.

According to MacIntyre (2005), the virtues must first be understood in terms of 'practices'. This concept is retrieved from the Homeric account of the virtues. In heroic societies, a man is defined by 'the mask he wears', to use Hollis's (1996) metaphor. In *The Iliad*, for instance, the virtuous agent excels at a particular activity, in his social role (Finley, 2002). The Homeric perception that the virtues stem from practices, provides MacIntyre with an arena in which the virtues are identified. As MacIntyre explains, a practice implies standards of excellence and goods internal to itself. These are distinguished from external goods by the fact that the former can *only* be achieved by engaging in the practice in question. For instance, the goods that consist in playing chess well (i.e. strategic capacity), are goods internal to such a practice; material rewards, such as money and status are external goods<sup>88</sup>. The latter are contingently attached to such practices and "are objects of competition from which winners and losers emerge" (MacIntyre, 2005: 188- 190); when such goods are achieved, they become the property of a specific individual. In contrast, internal goods can only be specified in terms of a practice and can only be identified through the experience of participating in the practice in question (Murphy, 2003; Miller, 1994; Mela, 2011). Whilst internal goods are also the outcome of competition to excel, their achievement is a

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<sup>88</sup> As I suggest later on however, MacIntyre's characterization of external goods is rather problematic when it comes to political power.

good for the entire community, as opposed to merely being possessed by and benefiting only a particular individual.

Therefore, the criteria for virtuous conduct are determined by the practice one is engaged in. This concept highlights the importance of the wider social context: entering into a practice requires one “to heed and accept the authority of those standards and the inadequacy of one’s own performance as judged by them” (MacIntyre, 2005: 199). To virtuously engage in a practice, one has to absorb the standards of such a practice, to identify oneself with the ends served by it, and to grasp and cultivate through experience the intrinsic goods and virtues secured by it. In short, the concept of a practice provides us with objective standards of excellence, reasons for striving to cultivate the virtues and a kind of ‘substitute’ *telos*.

The term ‘substitute’ should be highlighted here, since the ends produced by practices do not amount to a satisfactory *telos*. For anyone not living as a Homeric character, a life informed by a conception of virtue solely derived from practices would be excessively fractured and arbitrary: “the modern self with its criterionless choices” would reappear “in the alien context of what was claimed to be an Aristotelian world” (MacIntyre, 2005: 202). A crucial problem then, is how to rationally adjudicate between the competing ends of the various practices which compose one’s life. To do so however, we need an account of a *telos* for one’s whole life in light of which these can be adjudicated. Thus, casting a conception of virtue solely in terms of practices will always be insufficient: in the absence of a teleological approach our conception of certain virtues remains “partial and incomplete” (MacIntyre, 2005: 202). But, in Aristotle’s account, ethics is conceived as a “science” and “presupposes his metaphysical biology”: human beings have a specific nature, so that we have certain aims and goals and move towards a specific *telos* (MacIntyre, 2005: 162). This is the part of Aristotle’s theory which MacIntyre completely rejects. And this rejection invites an

alternative account of the *telos* of man - it is here that MacIntyre's new teleology, which allows for the possibility of moral tragedy and conflict, emerges.

This alternative account is, as suggested, partly retrieved from a pre-Aristotelian standpoint - MacIntyre supplies the Homeric concept of a practice in which the virtues are identified. But, in addition to Homer's *epēn*, MacIntyre draws insights from the tragedians. This underpins, perhaps the most crucial dissatisfaction MacIntyre has with Aristotle's thought. Aristotle's thought, MacIntyre observes, is replete with "a hostility to and denial of conflict either within the life of individual good man or in that of the city" (2005: 157). What MacIntyre detects here, is the more ancient belief, "descending unashamed", to use Stuart Hampshire's (1993: 43) words, to Aristotle from Plato's *Republic*: the Platonic Ideal or the doctrine of final rational harmony. Like Plato, Aristotle held that since conflict in the *polis* is 'the worst of evils', the good life should be unitary, composed of a hierarchy of goods: "there exists a cosmic order which dictates the place of each virtue in a total harmonious scheme of human life". Consequently, "conflict and virtue are mutually incompatible and exclusive" - a situation whereby "rival goods at war with each other" is deemed inconceivable (MacIntyre, 2005: 141- 142). Central to this vision, MacIntyre reminds us, is the belief that conflict is "the result of flaws of character" or of irrational and "unintelligible political arrangements" (2005: 157). But does this postulation "cover Antigone and Creon, Odysseus and Philoctetes or, even Oedipus"? (MacIntyre, 2005: 179).

Herein lies MacIntyre's dissatisfaction with Aristotle: he "offers too simple and unified a view of the complexities of the human good" (2005: 157). In short, Aristotle's emphasis on "coherence and unity" is an impossible "idealization" (2005: 157). For, "we do not live in a universe of great moral coherence". Philosophical conceptions of the coherence and homogeneity of goods and virtues perhaps "win logical elegance" but "at the cost of sacrificing our grasp of the tragic nature of moral reality" (MacIntyre, 1972: 334). This, MacIntyre notes, is a point which "a spokesman of the modern liberal view", presumably

Berlin, Hampshire and Williams, “might argue with a good deal of cogency and with which” it is “difficult to disagree”<sup>89</sup> (2005: 156 - 157). In a similar line with Berlin’s (1990) and Hampshire’s (1989; 1993) contention that historical experience suggests that moral conflict is ineliminable, MacIntyre suggests that “if we look at the realities of the Athenian society, let alone Greek society as a whole or the ancient world, what we find is a recognition of a diversity of values, of conflicts between goods, of the virtues not forming a simple, coherent and hierarchical unity” (2005: 157). What Aristotle takes to be impossible then, is precisely that which makes drama possible; hence, MacIntyre’s turn to Homer and Sophoclean tragedy constitutes an attempt to correct Aristotle’s dismissal of the messy nature of our ethical reality.

What emerges from MacIntyre’s account is a point I gestured at in the previous section: MacIntyre concludes about Aristotle the same thing he concluded about the *philosophes*: Aristotle claims a “universal rational authority” which cannot be sustained<sup>90</sup> (2005: 232). In so doing, MacIntyre makes room for the Berlinian (and Hampshire’s) recognition that the malaise of philosophy began long before the Enlightenment project. Of course, the crucial difference is that unlike the *philosophes*, Aristotle’s ethical approach was teleological - a conception which MacIntyre maintains. This leads us to the second ingredient of MacIntyre’s scheme, the narrative unity of human life.

This element integrates Aristotle’s contention that we should approach the ethical life of an individual as a whole and in functional terms, with “the kind of thesis about the interrelationship between virtues and forms of narratives which is present in epic and tragic writers” (MacIntyre, 2005: 147). This gives rise to a conception of life as an enacted dramatic narrative within which the central characters are also authors. MacIntyre’s narrative

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<sup>89</sup> I should note here that whilst Berlin, Hampshire and Williams are spokesmen of the modern liberal view, their thought should be distinguished from the prevalent Rawlsian version of liberalism. I say more on this in chapter 7.

<sup>90</sup> See Kulenovic (2007).

conception furnishes his account with a non-Aristotelian teleological conception, which avoids the problem of arbitrary adjudication between different practices whilst simultaneously allowing for tragedy and conflict. What emerges from this concept is an alternative conception of the self, “whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death”; thus, “I am”, MacIntyre says, “what I may justifiably be taken by others to be in the course of living out a story that runs from my birth to my death” (2005: 217).

MacIntyre’s concept of the narrative unity of life, is underpinned by two interrelated claims: i) that “man is in his actions and practice, essentially a story telling animal” and that ii) in order to understand one’s actions and virtues, we must place these in a narrative sequence; in short, the virtues stemming from our engagement in practices should be seen as “contributing to the good of the whole life” (2005: 273). MacIntyre’s first claim reflects much of our ordinary experience: in order to identify “what someone else is doing we always move towards placing a particular episode in the context of narrative histories ... both of the individuals concerned and of the settings they act and suffer” (2005: 211). That this activity constitutes an integral part of our experience seems uncontroversial<sup>91</sup>. However, MacIntyre additionally contends that, in the absence of a narrative approach to ethics “there is no way to fully understand any individual life, including our own” (MacIntyre, 2005: 216). We will miss much, as contemporary philosophy does, of the virtues and of the significance of our attachments.

This point becomes particularly compelling when we consider Antoine Saint-Exupery’s *Little Prince*. Saint-Exupery’s novel is centred on the relationship between the innocent little prince and his rose. One day, the prince discovers a garden of roses, identical to his rose: “I thought I was rich, with a flower that was unique ... all I had was a common rose” (2002: 60 - 62). Had the story ended here, with the little prince presumably throwing

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91 A testament of how common the activity of narrating individual lives is found in autobiographies. See Edyvane (2007).

away his rose, the modern criterionless and 'static' self would regain in ascendancy. But the prince finds meaning in the virtues of friendship and love by reflecting on the narrative of his life:

To all other roses he says this: 'you are not at all like my rose... An ordinary passer-by would think that my rose looked just like you .... But in herself alone she is more important than all the hundreds of other roses: because it is she that I have watered; because it is she that I have put under the glass globe ... Because she is my rose (2002: 68).

Thus, the prince's rose "is not perceptually unique, but unique she is, made unique by the history of their love" (Raz, 2001: 22). The bond the prince has with his rose stems from their common history: "the prince grew her" (Edyvane, 2007: 44). And it is via a reflection and appreciation of their common history that the prince finds meaning and value in his attachment.

Hence, "I can only answer the question 'what I am to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself part?'" (MacIntyre, 2005: 201). To understand what I ought to do and choose between conflicting practices, goods and values I must recognize that the story of my life has a narrative structure: "the notion of a history", MacIntyre says, "is as fundamental a notion as the notion of action: each requires the other" (2005: 214). In the absence of any understanding of the roles which we occupy, Sue Mendus (2009a) and Martin Hollis (1996) add, we cannot have an adequate sense of 'the self', and thus discern which course of action to employ. Hence, the way I define myself now, flows from what I was in the past; the search of what I am, ought to do and become is a journey that connects our past, present and future; consequently, the virtuous life is a quest for the good. This brings us to the final element of MacIntyre's account.

Each individual quest for the good is conducted under different circumstances and contexts. Consequently, the narrative of an individual's life should be understood against the background of the wider context within which that individual is placed<sup>92</sup>. And, these differences not only stem from the different practices one engages in, but also from the "traditions of which the individual's life is a part" (MacIntyre, 2005: 220). Traditions give to one's life its own moral starting point and, partially, its distinctiveness: "I am someone's son, someone else's cousin or uncle; I am a citizen of this city, a member of this guild or profession; I belong to this clan, that tribe, that nation" (MacIntyre, 2005: 220). Therefore, it is from our social and historical embeddedness which we partially derive our social identities and initial set of practices. This thought, I should note here, runs contrary not only to Aristotle, who lacks a sense "of the specifically historical" (MacIntyre, 2005: 147), but also to the post-Enlightenment conception of the self. From the standpoint of the post-Enlightenment conception of the self, "I am what I myself choose to be", so that "I can always, if I wish to, put in question what are taken to be the merely contingent social features of my existence" (2005: 220). Yet, just as Saint- Exupery's little prince finds meaning in his attachment by reflecting on its narrative history, so do we - to cut ourselves off from such traditions, is to distort our present relationships and identity<sup>93</sup>; we find ourselves part of a community and a past and "whether we like it or not, whether we recognize it or not, the bearers of tradition" (2005: 221).

Let me now bring together the various elements of MacIntyre's positive account and consider how it departs from conventional virtue ethics frameworks so that it allows us to capture the possibility of moral tragedy and conflict - *ergo* the problem of DH, as conventionally understood. MacIntyre's account is expounded in terms of the notions of a practice,

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92 "What is to live the good life" MacIntyre notes "varies from circumstance to circumstance, even when it is the same conception of the good life and the same set of virtues" (2005: 212).

93 See also Mendus (2009a).

the narrative unity of a human life and tradition. It departs from Aristotelian virtue ethics in two significant respects: i) it rejects Aristotle's metaphysical biology and replaces it with a narrative conception of life and ii) it rejects the unity of virtue thesis and its dismissal of conflict and tragedy. As noted, MacIntyre gleans insights from epic and tragedy: his account is formulated in terms of the multiplicity, plurality and heterogeneity of principles and goods and, as such, "it allows for the possibility of tragic conflict" (MacIntyre, 2005: 201). This creates the conceptual space to capture and reinterpret the DH problem, as it recognizes that the messy nature of our moral reality renders innocence - as the absence of wrongdoing - fragile. MacIntyre's account captures the central insight of the standard DH thesis, what I termed the Moral Reminders Thesis (see chapter 3). This is explicitly stated in the following passage: in tragic conflicts, MacIntyre says, "by choosing one [course of action], I do nothing to diminish or derogate from the claim upon me of the other"; rather, "whatever I do, I shall have left undone what I ought to have done"<sup>94</sup> (2005: 224). Hence, in line with DH theorists, MacIntyre suggests that once we are confronted with a moral conflict, there exists a moral remainder. The human condition is such, according to MacIntyre, that tragedy and the loss of innocence as the absence of wrongdoing are an ever present possibility. This is also implied in his narrative conception of life; as he says, "at any point in an enacted dramatic narrative we do not know what will happen next" (2005: 215). The permanence of circumstantial moral luck, or what MacIntyre calls unpredictability, deems this type of innocence far from guaranteed. This, he emphasizes, is precisely why quests and human lives sometimes fail.

I should, however, emphasize here that a number of differences exist between the way MacIntyre captures tragic conflicts *vis-à-vis* the orthodox DH thesis. For, these differences suggest that MacIntyre's account is capable of providing a more nuanced account of moral tragedy than the standard DH thesis. For instance, MacIntyre's conception enables us

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<sup>94</sup> MacIntyre thus rejects the covering law model of morality.

to resist framing DH in a vacuum - by interpreting it as a clash between abstract deontological and utilitarian rules. Instead of assuming that ordinary morality is deontological or utilitarian and thereby ask the question ‘by what principles am I, as a rational person bound?’ we have to ask this: ‘by what principles are we as potentially rational persons bound in our relationships?’ (MacIntyre, 2006). For, it is only from our social relationships and practices that we can discover our principles and achieve the goods internal to these relationships and practices<sup>95</sup>. In short, MacIntyre’s positive thesis equips us with a concrete arena upon which we can ground and account for the plurality of goods and values. In so doing, it provides us with a theoretical framework upon which we can premise the standard conception of DH as a momentous and tragic conflict between two ‘impossible oughts’. As Peter Johnson notes, reinterpreting DH in light of MacIntyre’s account can make for “a richer perspective on the dirty hands problem than that provided by utility or rights-based philosophies which depend on abstract starting points” (1994: 57).

Reinterpreted in MacIntyrean terms then, DH involves “a choice between rival and incompatible goods” and values, which stem from one’s engagement in different practices and one’s situation in a wider social context. In such instances, “both alternative courses of action which confront the individual” lead to “some authentic and substantial good” (MacIntyre, 2005: 224). What constitutes “tragic opposition and conflict”, *ergo* DH (as conventionally understood), “is the conflict of good with good” (MacIntyre, 2005: 163). In Sophocles *Antigone* for example, there is an irreconcilable rivalry between demands and goods of the family and those of the *polis*. Yet, as mentioned, “to choose (between such competing claims) does not exempt Antigone from the authority of the claim she chose to go against” (MacIntyre, 2005: 143). Thus DH, statically conceived, involves “crucial conflicts in which different virtues appear as making rival and incompatible claims upon us” so that “we cannot bring rival moral truths into complete harmony with each other” (MacIntyre, 2005: 143).

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<sup>95</sup> See also MacIntyre (2006).

In such tragic situations, there exists an irreducible conflict between two or more principles and goods; “one virtue is *temporarily* at war with another”, so that the “possession of one virtue might exclude the possession of another” (MacIntyre, 2005: 142; my emphasis). Consequently, MacIntyre says, the agent “may behave heroically or unheroically, generously or ungenerously, gracefully or gracelessly, prudently or imprudently” (2005: 224). In *The Antigone*, doing what is virtuous *qua* sister becomes momentarily incompatible with doing what is required *qua* citizen; allegiance to both such goods can no longer be maintained. In short, Antigone dirties her hands (in the conventional use of the word), as she “cannot do everything she ought to do” (MacIntyre, 2005: 224); she is bound to act virtuously *qua* sister, but viciously *qua* citizen or *vice versa*.

So far I have shown how MacIntyre’s conception allows for tragic conflict and for a richer and more nuanced interpretation of DH (as conventionally understood by standard DH theorists) *vis-à-vis* the standard DH thesis. Reinterpreted in MacIntyrean terms, the problem of DH involves a *temporary* conflict of good with good, value with value, and subsequently, the tragic but momentary renunciation of one value or virtue, and the practice of a vice; in such instances innocence, conceived as the absence of moral wrongdoing is lost. But, I have said nothing of politics and of the virtues necessary for engaging in such a practice. And it is at this point, which the ghost of Machiavelli reappears and re-imposes on us the unavoidable question of ‘What sort of person should the politician become?’

As I have suggested in chapter 4, to frame DH in politics as a temporary tragic choice - the strict outcome of moral luck - is unsatisfactory. For, the nature of politics is such that DH dilemmas are *systematic*, *predictable* and *enduring*. Whilst it is our moral world as a whole which is irredeemably tragic, for the individual who has decided to lead a political life, conflicts and DH acts are far from forced. They are also far from unexpected. What is more, there exists, as we saw, a discrepancy between the loss of innocence as the absence of wrongdoing and the loss of innocence as a disposition: innocence as a disposi-

tion may remain as a feature of one's character, even after one becomes guilty of moral wrongdoing. Any reinterpretation of DH as a single and stark choice can get us only this far.

To be sure, both 'static' and 'dynamic' DH, have in common at least this much: the agent 'must resolve and decide', as Hollis puts it, 'not merely what to *do* but who to *be* and *become*' (1996: 104). But, some of the points I advanced in the previous chapter suggest that the practice of politics requires the virtuous politician to repudiate his innocence - conceived as a disposition *at the time* such an individual voluntarily decides to *become* a politician. And this may occur long before he becomes guilty of any kind of wrongdoing- and before he becomes dirty-handed in the conventional use of the term. This much also follows from the cases of Brutus and Henry: these individuals fail in politics not because of their unwillingness to momentarily act viciously. They fail because of their ignorance of the political world, their inability to cultivate certain distinct political virtues, which would permanently stain their 'beautiful souls'. It is to the conception of DH in politics in dynamic terms I shall now turn. I contend that MacIntyre's account not only allows us to capture the possibility of momentary moral tragedy and conflict, but that some of its core elements also compel us to move beyond the mere snapshotty and static conceptualization of DH in politics.

#### **5.4. Towards a Dynamic Account of DH: The Virtue of Vice**

What sort of person should the virtuous politician become? Addressing this question, and thereby capturing DH in 'dynamic terms', requires us to approach political morality as a *whole*. And this involves approaching *politics as a practice* - an activity with goods and values internal to itself. As indicated, this approach yields two interrelated benefits: i) a concrete approach for grounding ethics contra to the abstract rules advanced by contemporary philosophy; and ii) the provision of dynamic ethical standards, as it will enable us to identify certain distinct dispositions of character conducive to political excellence. Howev-

er, since our conception of certain virtues is bound to be partial and incomplete without reference to a *telos*, MacIntyre's conception of life as a dramatic narrative is also necessary. In short, capturing DH in dynamic terms also requires us to approach *politics as a way of life*. Which kinds of goods and virtues are integral to politics nonetheless, MacIntyre does not say. This is the point at which we should turn to Machiavelli.

Whilst MacIntyre does not mention the political virtues, his concept of a practice provides us with the ground to premise Machiavelli's insights. That the Florentine approaches politics in this way was highlighted in chapter 4. This is also acknowledged by Quentin Skinner who observes that Machiavelli focuses on "the right qualities of princely leadership" (2000: 24). This suggests that Machiavelli departs from Aristotle in a similar way to MacIntyre: by rejecting his metaphysical biology. As Machiavelli tells us, discussing political virtue (*virtù*) by imagining "republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth" is fruitless. For, conventional virtue ethicists - Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine for instance - fail to grasp that "it is so far from how one lives to how one should live that he who lets go of what is done for what should be done learns his ruin rather than his preservation" (*Prince*: 15). Hence, political virtue cannot aim at anything outside itself: whereas "for Aristotle virtue is *shown* in politics", for Machiavelli, "virtue is *defined* there" (Mansfield, 1996: 22). Simply put, the standards of political excellence arise from within politics as opposed to any external moral standpoint.

Needless to say, the above remarks do not merely suggest that Machiavelli's philosophy sits comfortably with MacIntyre - at least with his conception of practice and the narrative of human life. Besides, in light of MacIntyre's 'negative thesis' and my critique of the standard DH thesis, this is to be expected. Machiavelli's warning that failure to cultivate political virtue brings one's "ruin rather than his preservation" additionally suggests what the purpose of *virtù* should be - or, what (some of) the ends and goods of politics are (some of which I mentioned *en passant* in chapters 3 and 4). Machiavelli's teachings, Whelan ob-

serves, are primarily “put negatively”<sup>96</sup> (2004: 141). Whilst considering the ends of politics, Machiavelli urges us to pay attention to how Rome was burned - “its citizens destroyed”, its “ancient temples desolate” and its “ceremonies corrupted” (*Discourses*: 143). Starting from this position, one recognizes that to achieve anything of additional value there needs to be a degree of order and security, a relatively stable framework within which more subtle relationships and practices can develop. As Berlin puts it:

Men need rulers because they require someone to order human groups governed by diverse interests and bring them security, stability, above all protection against enemies, to establish social institutions which enable men to satisfy their needs and aspirations (1981: 40).

In this sense, *virtù* encompasses certain qualities of character which are conducive to the establishment and maintenance of a political community. Differently put, political virtue involves certain dispositions which help one to address what Williams terms the first question of politics: “the securing of order, protection, safety, trust, and the conditions of cooperation” (2002a: 3).

In connection to this, two intertwined issues merit clarification here. First, the various (pejorative) connotations Machiavelli’s name bears aside, the Florentine did not think that practitioners of politics should address this question by bringing about a reign of terror: the whole point of politics was to save people from this. Second, this need not preclude the recognition that the practice of politics is related to more ‘positive ends’. The pursuit of positive ends however, is conditional on Machiavelli’s recognition that “the people have a negative desire not to be dominated” (McCormick, 2001: 300). It is also conditional on his cautionary warning that inflexibility and the pursuit of utopian fantasies are bound to be disas-

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<sup>96</sup> For a distinction between positive or aspirational and negative or preventive politics see Edyvane (2013).

trous. I shall say more on this later on, but what I wish to note here is that whilst political rule also involves a quest to secure other positive values, these values cannot act as categorical constraints on political stability (Philp, 2001). The first question of politics, Williams explains, bears this adjective precisely because it “is a condition for solving, indeed posing, any others” (2002a: 3).

Politics for Machiavelli is thus a complex activity: its practitioners operate within a context which “is unstable and subject to flux” (Wolin, 2004: 202). And, since “society is normally a battlefield in which there are conflicts between and within groups” (Berlin, 1981: 41), politics is always bound to involve a struggle to secure and exercise political power<sup>97</sup>. This external good needs to be underlined here. For, political power - the ownership of various resources (Philp, 2001) and the dexterity to get people do things which they otherwise would not do (Dahl, 1957; Wolin, 2004) - renders MacIntyre’s characterization of external goods somewhat problematic. For, power is not just contingently attached to political practice: it forms a necessary precondition for the satisfaction of political ends and benefits both the community and the individual practitioner of politics. Differently put, failure to accumulate and exercise political power (or lacking in knowledge on how to effectively do so) is bound to bring about the demise of both the political leader *and* the community (this is also suggested by Machiavelli’s and Shakespeare’s discussions of Soderini and Henry respectively).

Virtuous political practice is additionally intertwined with an external good Machiavelli prizes the most: glory. This good is, perhaps, best illustrated by bringing into mind:

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97 In chapters 6 and 7, I say more on how the recognition that politicians operate in a context of competing and incompatible traditions, each with its own aspirations, conceptions of the good and interests relates to Machiavelli’s understanding of political relationships.

the Vatican, a storehouse of works of art and monuments from the Church's often turbulent history ... In the Vatican, the weight and splendour of the institution, and the continuity of its story seem to overwhelm the single individuals who have played, and are playing, a glorious part within the institution (Hampshire, 1989: 174).

Whilst in the long-run practitioners of politics are dead, glory is the plaudit of history. It forms an authoritative criterion for, and an appropriate tribute to, political virtue.

So, the prince demonstrates *virtù* by appreciating the challenges inherent in the establishment and maintenance of political rule. But what are the specific virtues Machiavelli recognizes as being necessary for the sustainment of political practice then? Machiavelli's infamous advice that the prince must 'learn how not to be good, and to use this and not use it according to necessity' is already suggestive here. Again, I should emphasize that Machiavelli does not merely indicate that a politician should only learn how not to momentarily *act* in an innocent manner, as the static DH thesis indicates. While Machiavelli does acknowledge that "to adopt safe courses" in politics, by refusing to get DH once confronted with a static paradox of action would be disastrous, the way he unveils the problem goes beyond this recognition (*Prince*: 91). Since politics is an on-going practice, Machiavelli's advice is that once the individual chooses to pursue such a path, he must paradoxically learn how not to *be* perfectly virtuous. As Machiavelli puts it, political virtue partially rests on "those vices without which it is difficult to save one's state" (*Prince*: 62). As he says "if one considers everything well, one will find to be virtue, which if pursued would be one's ruin", and "something else appears to be vice, which if pursued results in one's security and well-being" (*Prince*: 62). Machiavelli's recognition that political virtue is inextricably intertwined with the cultivation and practice of the vices may initially strike us as odd, if not obfuscatory. This much is suggested by de Wijze's endorsement of Senator Goldwater's remark that "extremism in the defence of liberty is no vice" (2005: 456) - and his postulation

that this remark is expressive of the standard DH thesis. Yet, it is precisely this idea which lies at the core of Machiavelli's notion of *virtù*: the nature of politics is such that, one should not be innocent and *tout court* virtuous as conventionally understood.

This point brings to the fore a crucial insight I acknowledged in chapter 4. In addition to *the paradox of action*, acknowledged by standard DH theorists - the contention that DH involves an action that is justified yet abominable - Machiavelli recognizes that the conflict between morality and politics cuts much deeper: the problem of DH involves an additional, more dynamic paradox: *the paradox of character* - and this, as I explain in due course, stems from Machiavelli's recognition that the conflict between morality and politics involves a clash between two entire and exhaustive ways of life. The paradox of character is explicitly raised in chapter XV of *The Prince*, where he sounds the clarion call of one who "departs from the orders of others" (61). As indicated, Machiavelli rejects Aristotle's metaphysical biology and conceives the virtues as practice-based. But in delineating political virtue Machiavelli also notes that "virtue is in need of its contrary", as "it does not shine on its own". In short, political virtue needs "the added brightness that comes from contrast with and through the cultivation and occasional practice of vice" (Mansfield, 1996: 18). Pace Galston (2005), for Machiavelli political virtue is not a mean between two vices as Aristotle indicates. Machiavelli's aversion to Aristotelian ethics is betrayed in his indication that *virtù* is not necessarily located at the extremity of virtue but of vice (*Discourses*, 19 - 34). Consider for example his discussion of Agathocles of Syracuse, who rose to power via "a thousand hardships and dangers" (*Prince*: 35). And though "one cannot call it virtue to kill one's citizens, betray one's friends, to be without faith, without mercy, without religion", Machiavelli holds that Agathocles *did* possess political virtue: for "if one considers the virtue of Agathocles in entering into and escaping from dangers, and the greatness of his spirit in enduring and overcoming adversities, one does not see why he has to be judged inferior to any most excellent captain" (*Prince*: 35). In chapter XV of *The Prince*, Machiavelli lists the vic-

es and the virtues in pairs, as if they go together<sup>98</sup> - virtue and vice are complementary and both necessary for the virtuous politician. It is this unproblematic coexistence of virtue and vice, which brings to mind the image of yin and yang, which forms the essence of Machiavelli's *virtù*. In short, *virtù* involves a complex ethical schizophrenia: the virtuous politician should know "how to use the beast and the man"<sup>99</sup> (Machiavelli, *Prince*: 69). What are the beastly characteristics a prince must learn to cultivate and practice politics? Berlin has a short answer: the over-abundance of conflict, force, guile and evil in politics, implies that these can only be met "with force and guile" (1981: 51). Since politics is impossible without the vices of cruelty, dissimulation and fraud, the politician should learn how to emulate the "the fox and the lion" (*Prince*: 69).

The qualities of the lion, Machiavelli tells us, are particularly necessary during the founding moments of a political community: "of all princes, it is impossible for the new prince to escape the name of cruelty, because new states are full of dangers" (*Prince*: 66). This much is also suggested in Machiavelli's discussion of Cesare Borgia's cruelty. Whilst "Cesare Borgia was cruel", Machiavelli emphasizes, "one will see that he was much more merciful than the Florentine people, who as to escape a name for cruelty, allowed Pistoia to be destroyed" (*Prince*: 65). But the qualities of the lion are not enough in themselves. Both the lion and the fox are necessary, as "the one without the other is not lasting". The former "does not defend itself from the snares of politics" whilst "the latter does not defend itself from wolves" (Machiavelli, *Prince*: 69). In short, if one cultivates *only* the vices of cruelty and toughness, he would be deficient; he would not only be inflexible but he would also observe too much unwarranted faith in others. To possess *virtù*, "one needs" the perceptive

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98 For example, liberality is paired cruelty, whilst faithfulness is paired with unfaithfulness. See Mansfield (1996).

99 The process of developing *virtù* can be explained by turning to the tutelage of the ancient leaders. The ancients taught that leaders like Achilles were raised by the half-man, half-beast Chiron; and "to have as teacher a half-beast, half-man", Machiavelli indicates, means that "a prince needs to know how to use both natures" (*Prince*: 69).

qualities and cunningness of the fox. A successful politician, Hampshire tells us, should resemble “a burglar in the dark, who is ready to change direction when he runs up against an obstacle” (1989: 163). For, the greatest political successes, have been produced by those who knew how to handle adroitly matters of truth and falsehood; the practice of politics deems it necessary to know how to “colour” one’s appearance and nature and to be “a great pretender and dissembler” (Machiavelli, *Discourses*: 68- 70).

With the integration of MacIntyre’s notion of practice with Machiavelli’s conception of *virtù*, we are also in a better position to explain why Henry VI and Brutus not only tragically failed, but also why they were doomed to fail in politics. Henry’s innocence is completely antithetical to *virtù*. Henry’s calamity resembles the story of Scipio, “whose armies rebelled against him” (*Prince*: 68). Like Shakespeare, Machiavelli attributes this failure to Scipio’s innocence, his merciful nature (*Prince*: 68). In short, both Scipio and Henry lacked the qualities of the fox and the lion. In contrast to Henry, Brutus does seem to display (some of) the qualities which Machiavelli lists, such as love for patria and the excellences of the lion. Yet, he crucially lacks the wiliness of the fox, what Homer terms as *polymechanos* to describe the virtues of Odysseus (*Odyssey*: 486). This rendered him too innocent and dangerous for politics. Quite paradoxically, had Brutus’ dirtied his soul first, by expunging his innocence, he would have been able to better recognize the ‘snares’ of politics; the dirty act he employed would not have been necessary<sup>100</sup> (at least in that incident).

I should emphasize here that Machiavelli does not condemn innocence as a disposition, and the classical virtues expounded by conventional virtue ethics as defective in themselves. Nor does he reject the Aristotelian or Christian conception of the good man as inco-

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100 In this sense, Brutus’ lack of the qualities of the fox in general and political experience in particular led to the exhibition “cruelty bad used” to use Machiavelli’s terminology (*Prince*: 37). I say more on Machiavelli’s distinction between cruelty well used and cruelty bad used in chapters 6 and 7.

herent: “he does not say that saints are not saints, or that honourable behaviour is not honourable or to be admired” (Berlin, 1981: 49). Innocence as a disposition, which is closely aligned with the practice of religious obedience and the virtues of Christianity - such as ‘charity, *ozio*, mercy, and a belief in salvation of individual soul’ - should still be counted as leading towards one particular conception of the good; these virtues can be fully pursued by a purely private individual, someone who seeks some corner of his own, a martyr or an anchorite perhaps (Berlin, 1981). With respect to this mode of life then, these are still to be counted as virtues - otherwise Machiavelli would not have indicated that the qualities of Agathocles and Borgia are vices. But, as John Casey points out, the problem “lies precisely at that point where certain morally good qualities ... pass over into something else” (1983: 137). What Machiavelli condemns is the contention that such virtues are compatible with politics and that they constitute desirable qualities for a politician to possess<sup>101</sup>. As Berlin points out, “absolute generosity” for example “is a virtue, but not in princes” (1981: 59). To choose a life of innocence or, for Machiavelli, a life of religious obedience, whilst simultaneously aspiring to practice politics, is to condemn oneself to impotence and have the fate of Henry VI and Brutus: “to being used and crushed by powerful and ambitious, clever, unscrupulous men” (Berlin, 1981: 47). Innocence as a disposition in politics is not a virtue but a vice.

For the individual who considers entering politics then, the dynamic dilemma of DH does not merely involve two impossible ways of acting. As Berlin notes, Machiavelli “does not say that while in normal situations ordinary morality - that is the Christian, semi-Christian”, or the deontological, as standard DH theorists contend - “should prevail, yet abnormal conditions can occur, in which the entire social structure in which alone this code can function becomes jeopardized, and that in emergencies of this kind, acts which are regarded as wicked and rightly forbidden, are justified” (1981: 65). Rather, for Machiavelli

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<sup>101</sup> See also Mansfield (1996) and Hampshire (1989).

the problem of DH involves an intractable conflict between (at least) two incompatible and exhaustive ways of life. What is so disturbing (or *erschreckend*, to use Berlin's word) is Machiavelli's recognition that "there are at least two worlds" each with its own set of virtues and values. And "each of them has much, indeed everything, to be said for it; but they are two and not one" (Berlin, 1981: 59).

Viewed in dynamic terms then, DH concerns a conflict between, at least, two incompatible and exhaustive practices and ways of life, each with its own goods and standards of excellence. To be sure, once such a question is posed, this phenomenon may be initially painful as, in Berlin's words, "one must choose" (1981: 59). But, as suggested, this problem cuts much deeper than standard DH theorists allow. The real tragedy of DH, viewed from such a dynamic perspective, lies precisely in the recognition that "having chosen" one must "never look back" (Berlin, 1981: 59). *Pace* Walzer et al, what Machiavelli realized is that "one can save one's soul, or one can found or maintain or serve a ... state; but not always both at once" (Berlin, 1981: 50). Machiavelli's virtuous politician then, does pay a price. At the time such an individual chooses to practice politics, he completely rejects the prospect of an otherworldly salvation; his own *telos* involves only worldly achievements. As Mendus points out:

The important point to be noted here is that since it is impossible to reconcile all values, when we decide in favour of one world and against another it is certain that we will lose something of value. In choosing the life of religious obedience one forfeits the possibility of cultivating the virtues associated with the life of politics (2009a: 88).

Once one opts for a life of politics, one should commit oneself towards the cultivation of *virtù* and relinquish the moral virtue of innocence. The moral loss in such a dynamic interpretation of DH is understood as not only a temporary loss of a value or good, but of values

and goods which correspond to an *entire* way of life - and this is why such a choice may be initially discomfoting.

Beyond the point at which this question is posed nonetheless, and the initial fretting one may experience, the individual who chooses politics and heeds its demands is aware of the harsh realities of such a way of life. As suggested in chapter 4, this individual resembles Hampshire's (1989) 'man of experience' who *expects* that whilst engaging in such a practice his choices will *frequently* be between two incompatible values and 'oughts' - and thus involve 'static' DH. Unlike Walzer's politician and Brutus, the politician who possesses *virtù* relinquishes his innocence (as a disposition) and any hope of absolution, as soon as he decides to submit himself to the demands of politics. And it is precisely because there exist at least two exhaustive and irreconcilable worlds, one of which must be relinquished, that Machiavelli highlights that "one should not be troubled about becoming notorious for those vices without which it is difficult to preserve one's power" (*Prince*, XV: 61). With respect to the practice and life he has chosen, these ordinary vices are political virtues. As Berlin explains, the conflict which situations of DH raise "will be acute and extreme only for those who are not prepared to abandon either course": those, such as Walzer et al, "who assume that the two incompatible lives are in fact, after all, reconcilable" (Berlin, 1981: 66). The virtuous politician embraces Cavafy's advice to Anthony: once confronted with a paradox of action he is already "prepared, and graced with courage" to engage in an act of wrongdoing (1992: 33). For, his soul and innocence, have been lost at the time he decided to enter politics, long before his innocence - as the absence of wrongdoing - is forfeited.

But, if the virtuous engagement in the practice of politics inescapably requires one to unlearn the dispositions of a good man and become partially vicious at the time he decides to enter political life, then this creates an obvious problem for the virtuous politician. This relates to the antithetical expectations of most members of the political community, often expressed in despair, and usually accompanied by demands to purify politics (see

chapter 1). “Our fascination with the grubby integrity of secret-service men” Hollis points out “is evidence that we grudgingly accept this much”; but we have a “preference for finding it through fiction”, not through politics (1982: 396). Whilst “we tolerate wiretapping of terrorists and spying on unfriendly powers”, we “prefer not to be told” (Bellamy, 2010: 426). As Martin Jay similarly notes, we may laugh about the costs of “the decay of the art of lying”, but when it comes to politics we remain far less indulgent (2008: 9). Grasping the roots of this problem is of secondary importance for now - though the claim that there exists more than one conception of the good, and MacIntyre’s (2005) postulation that those who lack experience in a practice are incapable of discerning its virtues may be suggestive - but all we have to do to grasp its extent is to just recall standard DH theorists’ emphatic insistence that we need ‘morally good’ and ‘innocent’ politicians.

So the question here is ‘what should the virtuous politician do given such antithetical expectations’? If he does not lose his innocence by cultivating the vices - if he enters politics as a good man - he will not be a virtuous politician: he will fail - just like Walzer’s politician, Henry and Brutus. If he becomes partially vicious and the disapproving community becomes aware of this, he will, as suggested in chapter 4, fail again. Since “human conditions do not permit” the politician to be fully virtuous, and since “most people cannot accept the truth about *virtù*” it is necessary for him to “know how to avoid incurring infamy of those vices which may bring his demise” (*Prince*: 62). The qualities of the fox seem to have an additional role to play here: political success demands from the no longer innocent, yet virtuous politician to conceal his vices and to be perceived as being “all mercy, all faith, all honesty, all humanity, all religion” (*Prince*: 70- 71). The prince finds himself under a further necessity to employ fraud in his dealings: he must conceal wherever possible those actions and dispositions that are at odds with the traditional notion of virtue. He should, in Philp’s words, be able “to manipulate his own character and counterfeit aspects of his character to mimic the virtues” (2001: 41). *Pace* Walzer, in light of the dynamic account of DH, not only should the politician conceal his dirt after engaging in acts of DH, but the task of

hypocritical concealment should commence *by the time* this individual enters politics. In this sense, it should come as no surprise that the ‘static’ DH thesis leads to a counterintuitive and odd view of hypocrisy (see chapter 4). For, hypocrisy constitutes a character trait that only fully makes sense in dynamic terms: it functions as a kind of glue that holds together a virtuous political life.

I shall say more on this vice in the next chapters, but what is worth adding here is that the question of deception and of hypocritical concealment cannot be evaded even if one remains unconvinced by the central claim of the dynamic account of DH - the paradox of character. To illustrate this point, let us return to the claim I advanced in chapter 4, whilst considering the politician’s life as a whole. As suggested, once the politician gets his hands dirty once, there exists a second-order DH dilemma: this concerns the question of whether he should publically reveal his dirt, so as to reclaim his soul, following some form of expiatory punishment. The question of choosing between the ends of politics and religious obedience is re-imposed. And, as indicated, because this question presupposes a second-order DH dilemma, the politician is not immune from some form of moral wrongdoing as the static thesis suggests. Nor is the action-guiding answer to this question likely to be the one Walzer (1973) and de Wijze (2012) provide. Following MacIntyre, sufficiently answering the question posed by such a second-order DH dilemma presupposes that one answers the question of ‘what stories or story do I find myself a part of?’ If the politician reflects on his life, as St Exupery’s Little Prince does, he will realize that since his innocence has been forfeited, and his *telos* is antithetical to the salvation of his soul, there is, to repeat Berlin’s words, no way back: the politician cannot start from *tabula rasa*, by abruptly disassociating himself from politics. But the rejection of politics and the obligations one has incurred will not only result in a moral remainder; this individual’s life would also suddenly seem much less coherent. As MacIntyre says, one virtue which cannot be captured except with reference to the wholeness of human life is integrity. Without reference to integrity, “all the other virtues to some

degree lose their point” (2005: 242). This virtue is also implicitly captured by Berlin’s Machiavelli:

To fumble, to retreat, to be overcome by scruples, is to betray your chosen cause. To be a physician is to be a professional, ready to burn, to cauterise, to amputate; if that is what the disease requires, then to stop half-way because of personal qualms, or some rule unrelated to your art and its technique, is a sign of muddle and weakness and will always give you the worst of both worlds (1981: 59).

Integrity in one’s life and chosen practices requires the politician to ‘never look back’ once his choice is made. Hence, once confronted with such a second-order static DH dilemma, the politician must wear clean gloves. To be sure, the perversity of moral conflicts in politics brings to the fore a recognition I explore in more detail in chapter 7: that political integrity is fundamentally different from moral integrity. This much also follows from my suggestion that hypocrisy is inextricably intertwined with political integrity. What I want to emphasize here though, is that to approach political life as a whole does not push us back to an undesirable value-monism. Rather, since our moral reality is messy, composed by plural values and diverse ways of life, “if we allow that Great Goods can collide, that some of them cannot live together”, then the central claim of the dynamic account of DH reappears and cannot be evaded by any ‘static’ account, truly committed to taking moral conflict and pluralism seriously: we “cannot have everything, in principle as well as in practice” (Berlin, 1988: 6). Once again, the point here is that the virtues of one ideal character are or bring about the vices of the other.

## **5. 5. Conclusion**

My aim throughout this chapter was to locate DH within virtue ethics - and in particular MacIntyre’s neo-Aristotelian approach - so as to restore Machiavelli’s lost insights and set the foundations for a richer account of DH in politics. Having demonstrated that

MacIntyre allows for the possibility of tragic conflict and for a more nuanced account of DH (as conventionally understood), I suggested that MacIntyre's account also enables us to move beyond the static DH thesis (the conception of this problem as tragic and as a momentous paradox of action). I sought to develop a 'dynamic' account of DH in politics by utilizing elements of MacIntyre's core conception as a ground for premising Machiavelli's notions of political activity and *virtù*. The dynamic account captures the existence of an inexhaustible tension between (at least) two ways of life: the practice of politics requires the irretrievable relinquishment of innocence - conceived as a disposition- and any hope one has for the salvation of his soul. Hence, such an account captures an additional and deeper paradox - the paradox of character: leading a virtuous political life requires one to *become* partially vicious and no longer innocent. It is this recognition which lies at the core of Machiavelli's notion of *virtù* and which remains elusive for proponents of the standard DH thesis.

I should emphasize here two unavoidable objections to the dynamic account of DH. The first concerns the possibility that Machiavelli's conception of politics and *virtù* may be prone to the charge of historical specificity. This objection was also acknowledged in chapter 3 but is more explicitly stated by Maureen Ramsay who writes that Machiavelli's teachings "are inappropriate to and outdated in the non-Machiavellian political context of relationships between and within liberal democratic states" (2000a: 159). The second related objection often voiced alongside this postulation is that the vices (the qualities of the lion and the fox) are entirely antithetical and threatening to the values and virtues modern democratic societies purport to serve and foster (Osborne, 2005; Dovi, 2001; 2007; Shapiro, 2003; Davidson, 2004). This much is also echoed in some of the contemporary cries of exasperation I documented in chapter 1; recall Phillip Pullman's citing of William Blake's *The Auguries of Innocence* and his emphasis "on the dangers posed by vice when it comes to public virtue" (2010: 1). What both of these objections imply then is that the core insight of the dynamic account of DH - the virtue of vice - is only of an abstract, historical interest and

irrelevant to our ordinary democratic politics. Challenging this claim in light of the fox-like vice of hypocrisy is the task of the next chapter.

## 6. Dynamic DH and Democratic Politics: The Virtue of Hypocrisy

*The hypocrite-villain, has become marginal,  
even alien, to the modern imagination.*

L. Trilling<sup>102</sup>

*Particularly in contemporary liberal democracies, most  
politicians practice most of what they preach.*

P. A. Furia<sup>103</sup>

### 6. 1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I located DH within the tradition of virtue ethics in an attempt to capture the problem in all its complexity and restore Machiavelli's lost insights on political morality. DH, understood in dynamic terms, involves a *paradox of character*, not just a *paradox of action* (or a series of these): leading a virtuous political life requires one to *become* partially vicious and no longer innocent.

My general aims in this chapter are two-fold. First, I want to argue that the paradox identified is not merely of an abstract, historical interest but that it constitutes a real and inescapable issue for democratic politics today. Second, I shall suggest that liberal democratic societies are somehow implicated in promoting and exacerbating the vices (or at least some manifestations of them). To put it differently, democratic politicians operate in a context which renders the cultivation and continuous exhibition of some of the vices necessary. I pursue both of these tasks by turning my attention to the explicit examination of the vices - and, in particular, to a vice I briefly touched on in previous chapters: hypocrisy. Whilst it is not my intention to produce a simple list of our virtues and vices - given the complexity of

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<sup>102</sup> *Sincerity and Authenticity*, 16

<sup>103</sup> *Democratic Citizenship and the Hypocrisy of Leaders*, 126

our moral reality and the diversity of our practices and traditions, I am, like Judith Shklar (1984) and Andy Sabl (2002), not persuaded that this is possible - my emphasis on hypocrisy is not accidental. This boils down to two general reasons which should be emphasized here. First, as I have indicated in chapters 4 and 5, hypocrisy forms an integral part of political integrity: it constitutes one of the strings that hold together a virtuous political life. Second, the way in which hypocrisy is typically portrayed by political theorists and public pundits sits neatly with the idealistic account of political morality which this thesis seeks to challenge (see chapter 1). After all, a liberal democratic polity is thought to be premised on transparency and accountability, not on hypocrisy and manipulation (Calhoun, 2002; Thompson, 2005). Furia's and Trilling's remarks in the title quote, as well as Michael Gilmore's (2003: 12) insistence on a democratic "cult of truth-telling" are *prima facie* indicative of this. The desire to wriggle free from hypocrisy, David Runciman writes, "is a recurring feature of even the most sophisticated discussions of its role in liberal politics" (2008: 196). This longing for an escape from hypocrisy still exerts its pull today and is even shared by proponents of the standard DH thesis (see chapter 4).

The discussion is organized into four sections. First, I shall provide a preliminary consideration of hypocrisy so as to set the context for the subsequent sections. In particular, I examine how it differs from the similar fox-like vice of lying. In the second section, I consider how hypocrisy is typically received in the context of liberal democratic politics. As I show, a considerable portion of political theorists and public pundits are adamant that hypocrisy i) is *tout court* unnecessary and undesirable in democratic politics and ii) ought to be avoided and unmasked. In the ensuing sections I seek to upset both claims. In the third section, I argue that whilst there are good reasons to conceive hypocrisy as a dangerous quality, it is paradoxically necessary and valuable for our ordinary politics. In so doing, I shall draw on Machiavelli's insights on political relationships and project these on to the practice of contemporary democratic politics. Political relationships are relationships of dependence as much as they are relationships of power: they are forged amongst practitioners of politics

who may despise one another and whose interests and aspirations are plural, conflicting and incompatible. In light of this recognition, I suggest that hypocrisy constitutes a ‘lesser vice’ and an inevitable by-product of ordinary democratic politics. For, its alternatives - truthfulness and open knavery - are neither always possible nor necessarily desirable. In the final section, I suggest that attempts to find an escape route from hypocrisy are an innocent and perilous delusion: the more one tries to unmask hypocrisy and to extricate oneself from its practice, the more hypocritical, unfit for and dangerous to democratic life one becomes.

## 6. 2. Hypocrisy: A Preliminary Consideration

‘Hypocrite’ is an epithet, never a term of praise. No doubt, *pace* Furia (2009) and Trilling (1972), there is a lot of this vice in our contemporary world. “No criticism of politicians in liberal democracies”, Dennis Thompson observes, “is more common than the charge of hypocrisy” (2005: 209). The problem with this, as with any vice, however, is not just that its practitioners abound - when it comes to hypocrisy we all have our favourite examples: from Stark’s (1997) ‘limousine liberal’ and Cohen’s (2001) ‘billionaire egalitarian’ to the more commonplace cases of flip-flopping politicians who misrepresent themselves as paragons of virtue. Whilst it seems easy to point at all these hypocrisies *ex post*, it is much harder to grasp the elusive nature of the vice. Even more difficult is to discern what to do with it and with those who practice it.

For some political theorists, this question welcomes a pithy answer. “Hypocrisy”, Shklar tells us, “remains the only unforgivable sin, especially among those who can overlook and explain almost every vice” (1984: 45). Shklar’s comment, one could retort, is inflated with exaggeration. Yet, standard DH theorists’ endorsement of cruelty but not of hypocrisy suggests otherwise. So, too, do the recent public reactions to the hypocrisies of politicians. For instance, when politicians like Bill Clinton were reported having illicit sex, much of the public outrage was directed neither against the fornication nor at the cheating of

their spouses: “it was the hypocrisy that bothered them” (Waldron, 2011: 1). Similar cries of exasperation were heard against the mismatch between Obama’s and Clegg’s pre-election promises and post-election policies (Gregory, 2012; Miller, 2012; Mitchell, 2012; Peirce, 2012). I shall say more on these cases later on, but what is important to note here is that these examples already suggest that hypocrisy is typically thought to be repulsive not just in private life (or with regards to ordinary morality) but also in public affairs. Before turning to this issue though, let me start with the question of how we are to capture this vice and its distinct characteristics. Doing so shall help us explain some of the charges so often levelled against it.

The idea of hypocrisy originates in theatre, whereby an orator (*hypocrites*), spoke under (*hypo*) and separate from (*krinein*) the otherwise homogenous chorus (Robinson, 1977). The literal meaning of this term was ‘to act a part’ and ‘to pretend to be something one is not’. Despite its ethical neutrality, the ancient usage of the term has striking links with our contemporary understanding of the notion, insofar as the language of the theatre occupies a place in our discourse about hypocrisy. It also *prima facie* explains some of the negative connotations the term has acquired. Individuals who play a part tend to be untrustworthy, because they hide behind the mask they wear: “they have”, in Runciman’s words, “more than one face they can display” (2008: 8). The theatre however, imposes limits to such theatrics by its own conventions - the audience is aware that what is being witnessed is a charade - whilst untrustworthiness and unreliability are hardly an issue. The problem with actors encountered in real life though, is that the audience is often unaware of what is being witnessed. Simply put, playing a part whilst the audience is unaware of one’s acting is always bound to involve some form of deception. This is also affirmed by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*): hypocrisy is associated with “insincerity, fraud, dissimulation and sham” (1901). Leaving aside for now the question of ‘who is the victim of deception’ (which I address in the fourth section), the question which merits more scrutiny here - especially if we

are to discern how hypocrisy differs from lying - is 'What the object of deception is'. In other words, if hypocrisy is understood as mask-wearing, what is being masked?

The prevalent conception of hypocrisy - which stems from the extension of the term from the theatre to public professions of religious faith by individuals who failed to practice what they preached (Hazlitt, 1964; Maloyed, 2011; Batson et al, 1997) - is suggestive here. Hypocrisy, the *OED* adds, involves "a false appearance of virtue or goodness, with dissimulation of real character or inclination" (1901). The hypocrite, Shklar explains, "pretends that his motives, intentions and character are irreproachable" when they are not (1984: 47). It is this type of hypocrisy I touched on in chapters 4 and 5. Recall Machiavelli's contention that the experienced and partially vicious politician should "appear all mercy, all honesty, all humanity and all religion" before the community (*Prince*: 62). What the hypocrite conceals behind his mask is his vices and dirty acts: he appears before his audience as perfectly virtuous and innocent.

To be sure, once hypocrisy is not bound by the conventions of the stage, it can take many forms. Hypocritical deception, Runciman indicates, can include "claims to consistency that one cannot sustain, claims to loyalty that one does not possess, claims to identity that one does not hold" (2008: 8). What unites these manifestations of hypocrisy though is that its practitioners construct a persona which helps them to amass certain external goods, to use MacIntyre's (2005) terminology. This is roughly captured by Bela Szabados and Eldon Soifer, who highlight that the hypocrite's aim is to "gain an unmerited self-interested reward" (2004: 166). The contention that such rewards are self-interested or unmerited aside (which already suggests, however, that the literature perceives hypocrisy as unacceptable *tout court*) this recognition brings to the fore a Machiavellian insight I acknowledged in chapter 5 and which I shall explore in more detail here: satisfying the ends and realising the goods of politics becomes impossible if the politician does not wear a mask of virtue. "The hypocrite", Eva Kittay notes, "pretends to be better than she is, given a set of expectations,

within a domain in which sincerity really matters” (1982: 277). Likewise, if one is not (or can never be) virtuous, trustworthy and loyal in a domain in which these matter, the accumulation of certain goods may be impossible without some dissimulation.

But how, then, does hypocrisy differ from lying? Insofar as both such vices encompass aspects of deception, it might appear that hypocrisy does not differ from lying that much: the former manifests an extravagant form of the latter. Yet, if we are to maintain the language of the theatre as central to our understanding of hypocrisy, a differentiation between these two vices does exist. For, in its commonest form a lie is just a lie: a false, short and dry statement advanced with an intention to deceive (Mahon, 2008; Kupfer, 1982; Primoratz, 1984; Frankfurt, 1986). It certainly need not involve the construction of a persona or the putting on of a theatrical act. “An act”, Runciman explains, “involves the attempt to convey an impression beyond the instant of the lie itself” (2008: 9). In short, hypocrisy does not merely involve incongruence with the truth; the acting involved in the creation of a false impression, turns on questions of character and is much more enduring. The enduring nature of hypocrisy can also be glimpsed by highlighting its relationship with consistency. Whilst hypocrisy does encompass some sort of inconsistency (c.f. Barden et al, 2005; Stone & Fernandez, 2008; Maloyed, 2011) inconsistency *in itself* does not necessarily constitute evidence of hypocrisy. For, it is the commitment not to be inconsistent rather than inconsistency *per se*, that generates the conditions of this vice - and this, as I explain in due course, constitutes one of the reasons why hypocrisy is bound to be inescapable in politics.

Viewed from this perspective, it should come as no surprise that hypocrisy is regarded as a more vicious form of deception than lying. Nor is it surprising that hypocrisy is often derided as the ultimate vice. For, the rest of vices - such as lying and cruelty for instance- are much easier to detect (Shklar, 1984; Arendt, 1990). Hypocrisy, in contrast, operates in two layers. As Machiavelli recognizes, it is not just one of the necessary vices that politicians cultivate whilst unlearning a portion of their virtue and exhibit for strategic pur-

poses. It also forms a coping mechanism for concealing the rest of the vices (see chapters 4 and 5). Hypocrisy, in La Rochefoucauld's timeless phrase, constitutes "the tribute vice pays to virtue" (quoted in Runciman, 2008: 10). And whilst it is precisely this function which holds together a virtuous political life, the dressing up of vice as virtue seems to make things considerably worse: it piles vice on top of vice and limits our capacity to detect injustice.

And because hypocrisy involves a theatrical performance, the acts of the virtuoso of hypocrisy may be far more wide-ranging than those of the liar, whose repertoire of deceitful acts is rather limited. Whilst veracity and hypocrisy tend to be schematically conceived as opposites (especially by critics of the latter), the pretence of virtue may even include veracious statements. This paradoxical feature of hypocrisy is captured well by one of its great connoisseurs, Moliere. In Moliere's *Tartuffe*, the eponymous character pretends to be a model of religious faith and works his way into Orgon's estate, where he is sheltered and fawned upon. The discrepancy between hypocrisy and lying is evident in Tartuffe's reaction to Damis' (Orgon's son) accusation that he is a conman:

Yes, brother, I am wicked, I am guilty ...

No, no; you let appearances deceive you ...

The simple truth is, I'm a worthless creature (*Tartuffe*, III: 6).

What is striking here is that Tartuffe does not lie; he tells Orgon that he is a scoundrel - which is true. But Tartuffe's truthfulness does not amount to a genuine confession; he does not remove his mask, and he does not bring his act to an end. Orgon's reaction, who takes this confession as another indication of Tartuffe's virtue, is suggestive: he gets angry at Damis for accusing this saintly man and tries to earn Tartuffe's forgiveness by offering him his fortune. Tartuffe's truthfulness forms an essential part of his attempt to appropriate Orgon's wealth; the appearance of remorse and humility constitutes an integral aspect of his 'performance', even though his speech is literally veracious.

Let us now pause for a moment and extrapolate the distinct features of hypocrisy as a set of propositions: a) hypocrisy involves an enduring and vicious form of deception: the playing of a part and the wearing of a mask; b) the hypocrite conceals behind his mask his vices, intentions and commitments which he cannot honour; the audience is given the false impression that the character of this individual is irreproachable and trustworthy; c) the hypocrite's intention is to exploit the sensitivities of the audience so as to accumulate certain external goods.

If we understand hypocrisy as a theatrical form of deception, it is not only possible to discern how it differs from lying, but it is also not hard to see why it constitutes an antithesis to innocence. "In the end", Shklar tells us, "we learn that the virtuoso of hypocrisy is an *experienced* crook with a long criminal record" (1984: 51). To be clear, I do not wish to deny that hypocrisy comes in different guises. In the last section of this chapter I shall suggest that there are, at least, two types of hypocrisy: *the hypocrisy of experience* (the clear-eyed and self-conscious hypocrite advocated by Machiavelli which I defend in this chapter) and *the hypocrisy of innocence* (the unconscious and self-deceived hypocrite). As I shall explain, the crucial difference between these two types of hypocrites is that the experienced hypocrite knows himself for what he is: his mask is worn deliberately to *deceive others*. This knowledge is lacking in the latter: his mask is so compelling that *he deceives himself*. And whilst contemporary commentators often scorn hypocrisy *tout court*, failure to distinguish between these two types of hypocrisy has serious, indeed potentially disastrous, political implications. For, it is the hypocrisy of innocence that is particularly dangerous for politics. What I merely want to emphasize here though, is that *the virtuoso of hypocrisy* is neither inexperienced nor ignorant of evil: what lies beneath his mask is clear-eyed. The exploitation of others' trust requires considerable skill - something which innocent individuals lack. As Wittgenstein emphatically remarks, "a child has much to learn before it can pretend" (1958: 249). Innocent individuals are unable to deceive their audience; this requires a

capacity for manipulation, for speaking improperly and for what the ancient Greeks termed *poneria*<sup>104</sup> (wickedness).

So perhaps we must concede this much: with respect to a moral or purely private life, hypocrisy (or, to be more specific, the hypocrisy of experience) is obnoxious. Hypocrisy, Maugham stresses, is a “nerve-racking vice”; it requires “an unceasing vigilance” (2010: 1). This recognition is, perhaps, best captured in the works of the Christian tradition<sup>105</sup> which are replete with scorn for this vice. Consider for instance the ninth commandment - “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour” - as well as the *New Testament*’s dictum - “The mouth that belied killed the soul” (St Augustine, 1952a: 67- 71). Similarly, in Dante’s *Inferno* there can be no salvation for the hypocrite’s soul. Hypocrisy is a malady which makes for morally “weary and defeated humans”. It is those who possess the qualities of the fox, who are doomed to occupy the “lowest level of lower hell” (2005: 80 - 83). These accounts - *iff* restricted to a purely private or (Christian) moral life - are not incompatible with the Machiavellian insights of the dynamic account. Recall Machiavelli’s recognition that the qualities of the fox, despite being necessary for politics, are incongruent with an amiable private life or a life of religious obedience. Contemporary reflections on hypocrisy nonetheless, typically go beyond the contention that it is abominable only with respect to ordinary (Christian) morality. What Jonas Barish (1985) calls “the anti-theatrical prejudice” in Western culture is largely sustained in the modern era and extended to the practice of democratic politics.

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104 See Sultan (1999) and Crisp and Cowton (1994).

105 See also Crisp and Cowton (1994), Jay (2008), Augustine (1952b) and Szabados and Soifer (2004).

### 6. 3. Hypocrisy and Democratic Politics: Some Contemporary Reflections

The criticism of politicians for “playing politics”, as if this is somehow a betrayal of their practice, is far too common in the literature dealing with hypocrisy. At the core of most philosophical repudiations of hypocrisy seems to lie an assumption which I have arduously resisted and which I intend to challenge even further in this chapter: the Platonic ideal - the contention that the virtues or standards of excellence that apply to a private or moral life *can* and *should* be reconciled with those of politics (c.f. Trilling, 1955; 1972; Hollinger, 1977; Jowett & O’ Donnell, 1999; Boswell, 1952; Robinson, 1977). Here I wish to focus on a more specific way in which this assumption is advanced. I want to outline in more detail a position which I have briefly acknowledged in chapter 3 and which reinvigorates the Platonic ideal in the context of democratic politics.

The position I have in mind here reaches no less moralistic conclusions than those of moralists who postulate that “to begin to take morality seriously is to take the first step away from hypocrisy” (Crisp & Cowton, 1994: 347). It does, however, seem to take democratic politics more seriously - or, at least it claims to do so. In short, proponents of this position tend to perceive liberal democratic politics as more ethical than any other alternative, partly because it is said to render hypocrisy unnecessary and undesirable (c.f. Audi, 2000; Davidson, 2004; Furia, 2009; Ramsay, 2000a; 2000b; Dovi, 2001; 2007; Shapiro, 2003). As Ruth Grant writes:

One of the most important moral claims for democratic politics is that ... politics can be conducted openly without manipulation. The facts and the arguments will be put before the public or representative body and a decision will be made. Ideally each individual chooses on the basis of his own best judgement and each choice carries equal weight (1997: 53).

This ideal vision of liberal democratic politics is far from uncommon. It occupies a prominent place in examinations of political hypocrisy. As Szabados and Soifer (2004: 181) and McKinnon (1991: 227) emphasize, the hypocrite subverts “our system of morality by deliberately misrepresenting the arguments upon which we base our judgements”. Hypocrisy, they suggest, is unacceptable: it undercuts the basis of democratic politics.

This point also emerges from the writings of theorists of democracy: duplicity and hypocritical deception are democratically unacceptable; or, in reverse, transparency and truthfulness are synonymous with democracy<sup>106</sup> (Stiglitz, 2002; Sen, 1999; Dahl, 1971). In Peter Osborne’s words:

Citizens ... are entitled to be informed about their political choices. This includes a right not to be deceived ... Politicians who lie to voters deprive them of the ability to come to a well-informed decision about how to cast their vote. In so doing, they convert them into dupes (2005: 120).

What is worth adding here is that these claims are often accompanied by an explicit side-note that the shenanigans advocated by Machiavelli are not just undemocratic; they are also anachronistic and inapplicable to contemporary politics. Even those who *prima facie* concede that truthfulness and transparency might not be always possible are quick to acknowledge that this concession applies only to rare, unusual and ‘episodic’ acts of lying, not to hypocritical deception<sup>107</sup> (which is, as I suggested, much more enduring and conditional on the existence of *ex ante* or *ex post* dirty acts or viciousness). In any case, hypocrisy

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106 This postulation is also shared by John Rawls, whose position I discuss in chapter 7. See Reidy (2000), Kang (2003) and Weithman (2010).

107 Standard DH theorists are the obvious example here but this point is also made by Sissela Bok (1989) and is advanced in the earlier writings of Dennis Thompson (1989; 2005). For an exploration of this point see Mendus (2009b).

and deception are thought to be incompatible with ordinary politics and with the lives democratic politicians should lead. Or, so it is thought.

In other words, this position sits neatly with Suzanne Dovi's remark that politicians are "good democratic representatives only if they avoid hypocrisy" (2007: 221). To grasp how common this conviction is, we could just reflect on how frequently the lack of truthfulness and transparency is accompanied with notions (and accusations) of totalitarianism on the one hand and with 'democratic deficit', 'illegitimacy' and 'lack of accountability' on the other. In addition to the recent charges levelled against Obama's and Clegg's failures to materialize their pre-election commitments, the 'big lie', introduced in *Mein Kampf* - which became the favoured technique of totalitarian systems - constitutes a *clichéd* example of the former, whilst EU politics is the most obvious example that comes to mind in relation to the latter. The point here is that these examples are frequently used as a means to support the rather widespread conviction that democratic politics is not (and should not be) a home for hypocrisy. Or, in reverse, that "democratic leaders", to use Ian Shapiro's words, "can never be free from a commitment to truth-telling" (2003: 200).

What is worth emphasizing here is that the above remarks and examples seem to appeal to three interrelated arguments which sit well with our contemporary understanding of democracy and its value<sup>108</sup>. The first points to the recognition that, in democracies, governmental power - and temptations for its misuse - needs to be controlled via the provision of accurate and relevant information. Hypocrisy, by virtue of its close relationship with the notions of concealment and dissimulation, severely compromises these values. The second argument postulates that democratic government is a trust: since the people are the source of a democratic government's authority, the latter should be accountable to the former who must therefore know what politicians are doing or intend to do. In this sense, hypocrisy vio-

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<sup>108</sup> These points are also discussed by Williams (2002a), Mendus (2009b) and Thompson (1989).

lates this relationship between the trustee and people. Finally, such arguments appeal to our ordinary democratic practices and, in particular, to the rituals of elections. The whole point of such rituals is, as argued, to enable citizens to cast their vote, but not before they have reached an informed judgement; hypocrisy, especially during political campaigns, constitutes a mockery of such practices and of the equal value of each citizen's vote.

But the contention that hypocrisy and dissimulation are incompatible with democratic politics extends beyond the rather limited confines of philosophical analysis. After all, “no one enjoys being played for a fool” (Runciman, 2008: 2). Nor is it a secret that we tend to be sceptical of public ‘actors’, and prefer ‘straight-shooters’ instead (Markovits, 2008). Evidence that the quest for truthfulness and transparency is of an unimpeachable value abounds. For example, the 2002 issue of *Ms. Magazine* headlined ‘The Best of 30 years of Reporting, Rebellious and Truth-telling’; *MSNBC*'s Matthews (2001) promises to ‘Tell you what I really think’. Promoting Beck's show, *CNN* indicated that ‘this guy says it like he means it’. So, we glorify truthfulness, making bestsellers out of Paine's *Common Sense* in 1776 and O'Reilly's *The No Spin Zone* in 2001 (Markovits, 2008). Our intolerance of mask-wearing compels us to seek earnest public speakers we feel we can trust.

Finally, critics of hypocrisy suggest that it is not undemocratic or undesirable only in the sense that it may veil corruption, abuses of power and jeopardize our democratic practices. Hypocrisy, its critics argue, breeds “self-destructive consequences” (Alterman, 2005: 22). If there is an etymological link between truthfulness and trust (Williams, 2002b), then it seems to logically follow that the practice of hypocrisy is an anathema for contemporary societies: it deteriorates trust, a value which is conducive to political stability and fundamental for the functioning of our complex societies<sup>109</sup> (Williams, 2002a; Simmel, 1906). As Dovi puts it, hypocrisy has malignant effects in contemporary public life: it gives rise to “an

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<sup>109</sup> For a more detailed elaboration on this point see chapter 5.

unhealthy form of suspicion towards people's professed moral standards and principles" and can lead to cynicism, if not paranoia (2001: 15).

To recap, in this section I sought to provide an outline of how hypocrisy is commonly conceptualized in contemporary democratic politics. As indicated, the way this vice is conventionally received epitomizes the rather popular and idealistic way of thinking about political morality which is also shared by the standard DH thesis (see chapters 3 and 4) and which this thesis seeks to upset: hypocrisy is *neither necessary nor desirable* in democratic societies. Apologists of hypocrisy, its critics suggest, have in mind a different conception of politics, one which is anachronistic and threatening to our public arrangements. And, if hypocrisy is an anathema to democracy, its practice *should* and *can be* avoided and unmasked. In Michael Walzer's words, "the exposure of hypocrisy" is a fundamental requirement of public life: it constitutes "the most important form of moral criticism" (1977: xxiii). Not only should we try to move away from hypocrisy and the vices, but when the theatrics of public figures are spotted, the cry of 'hypocrite' should be heard loud and clear.

To be sure, I do not wish to deny that some forms of hypocrisy are dangerous for our politics. But this does not entail that the purified vision of democratic life which emerges from critiques of this vice and of our current condition is warranted - or, indeed, desirable. Nor is this to suggest that hypocrisy is *tout court* uncongenial to democratic politics. As Rebecca West nicely puts it, "because hypocrisy stinks in the nostrils, one is likely to rate it as a more powerful agent for destruction than it is" (1928: 307). In what follows I shall pursue these points in more detail. I want to suggest that vilifications of hypocrisy tend to misconstrue the lives modern public officials lead. They also misconstrue and over-idealize the context in which democratic politicians operate and the nature of political relationships. In advancing these claims, I examine Machiavelli's insights surrounding the necessity of hypocrisy more carefully, and project these on to the practice of democratic politics. In so doing, I seek to illustrate: i) the contemporary relevance of the dynamic account of DH and ii)

that democratic societies, by virtue of some of the very values critics of hypocrisy invoke to condemn its practice, are implicated in promoting and exacerbating its necessity. Second, I suggest that the quest for anti-hypocrisy is self-defeating. For, the more one tries to extirpate hypocrisy, the more hypocritical and dangerous for democratic life one becomes. I defer the latter issue for now, and turn to the former immediately.

#### **6. 4. The Political Virtue of Hypocrisy**

Machiavelli's defence of hypocrisy is premised on the recognition that this vice is crucial in sustaining a virtuous political life. To put it differently, hypocrisy enables practitioners of politics to secure certain goods which are intrinsic to *politics as a practice* and *politics as a way of life*<sup>110</sup>. It is on this general point, which I briefly acknowledged in chapters 4 and 5, I want to build here. What I seek to emphasize more clearly, however, is that Machiavelli's case for hypocrisy goes to the heart of the nature of political relationships. If Machiavelli's insights on political relationships are applicable to democratic societies - if it can be shown that transparency and honesty are not always possible or conducive to the virtuous practice of ordinary democratic politics- then no further justification surrounding the necessity to cultivate and, in certain instances exhibit, this vice is needed. For, as I shall illustrate, Machiavelli's defence of hypocrisy is also premised on the recognition that politicians are trapped between Scylla and Charybdis: when the alternatives to truthfulness - which is not always possible or desirable - are the lion and the fox, then the duplicity and hypocrisy of the fox has more appeal than the cruelty of the lion. The necessity of hypocrisy, however, depends on the impossibility of honest political relations in liberal democratic politics in the first place - something which idealistic accounts of political morality in gen-

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<sup>110</sup> This point, I should add, is premised on Machiavelli's assertion that the standards of political excellence arise from within politics rather than from an external, abstract moral standpoint.

eral and critics of hypocrisy in particular contest. And, the question of whether openness and transparency are either viable or desirable depends in turn on a certain understanding of the context in which politicians operate and political relations *per se*. It is on Machiavelli's insights surrounding the nature of political relations and, subsequently, on their projection on to the contemporary democratic context that I focus here.

#### 6. 4. 1. Machiavelli's Defence of Hypocrisy

Machiavelli's defence of hypocrisy is advanced in chapter XV of *The Prince*, where the Florentine discusses the prince's relations with subjects and friends ("*con sudditi o con li amici*"). This follows the section that deals with offence and defence in warfare. The distinction drawn between these two sections is not one of domestic and foreign affairs. The crucial distinction is between warfare and politics - between relationships amongst enemies and friends (*amici*), both domestic and otherwise. The term *amici* is analogous to political allies and as distinct from open enmities or true friendships (Musa, 1964; Grant, 1997). In short, Machiavelli suggests that in true friendships and open enmities hypocrisy is rarely necessary. Such relationships are voluntarily maintained and forged. They are also transparently intimate or hostile - the wearing of a mask or the playing of a part is not required. But political friendships, despite being necessary for the virtuous practice of politics, are quite different. And, as Machiavelli suggests, it is these differences which generate the necessity for hypocrisy.

The necessity to forge and sustain political relationships is couched in Machiavelli's conception of politics as a domain which is ridden with instability, uncertainty and perpetual power struggles. The prince, as I suggested in chapters 4 and 5, operates in a Heraclitian atmosphere of perpetual conflict, where "it is impossible to remove one inconvenience without another emerging," and where "one never finds any issue that is clear-cut." (Machiavelli, *Prince*: 91). In such conditions, leading a virtuous political life by solely relying on

“good arms” is neither always possible nor necessarily desirable; “good friends” are also necessary (Machiavelli, *Prince*: 96). What distinguishes political relationships from true friendships or open enmities though is that the former are forged out of necessity between actors with conflicting interests and conceptions of the good. “Political alliances”, Grant points out, are “not like family ties”: the former are about creating useful partnerships with people whose aims and aspirations do not coincide with your own - “with people who are ultimately your competitors” (1997: 21). The oxymoron of political relationships is that whilst such individuals are one’s competitors - and, as it is often the case, relationships forged between individuals with conflicting interests and conceptions of the good are also characterized by mutual suspicion and contempt (Machiavelli, *Prince*; Hampshire, 1989; 1993; Spicer, 2010; Edyvane, 2007) - even the most successful prince cannot embark on the quest for politics without any allies.

Political relationships then, are not just relationships of power; they are also relationships of *dependence* (Grant, 1997). This recognition - which flies in the face of the Platonic and post- Enlightenment conception of man as an independent, autonomous and self-sufficient agent - is also touched on by MacIntyre in *After Virtue*<sup>111</sup>. As MacIntyre tells us, whilst the agent is both the actor and the author of his dramatic narrative, “what the agent is able to do, and say intelligibly as an actor is deeply affected by the fact that we are never more (and sometimes less) than co-authors of our own narratives. Only in fantasy do we live what story we please”. Leading a life - in particular a public life- places one under constraints: “each of us being a main character in his own drama plays subordinate parts in the dramas of others, and each drama constraints the others” (2005: 213). Just as we do not begin where we please, we cannot go on exactly as we please either: “each character is constrained by the actions of others and by the social settings presupposed in his and their actions” (2005: 215). Likewise, Machiavelli recognizes that to conceive politics as an uncon-

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111 See Mendus’ (1989) account of liberal man and Nussbaum’s (2007) discussion of agency in Plato.

strained practice is unsatisfactory; politics takes place within a complex web of dependencies, dependencies which *virtù* entails a capacity to recognize and exploit.

So, in contrast to true friendships- which, according to Machiavelli, are based on “greatness and nobility of spirit” - Machiavelli instructs the prince to approach his political ‘friends’ with suspicion and with the knowledge that political friendships cannot be always sustained and honoured: such alliances, he tells us, “are acquired at a price and bought, but they are not owned and when the time comes cannot be spent” (*Prince*: 66). To be clear, I do not wish to suggest that Machiavelli’s account on friendship exhausts the range of relationships we might observe, either in politics or in private life. Nor does Machiavelli rule out the possibility of true friendships in politics *tout court*. Rather, the point here is that the rarity and fragility of, what Machiavelli terms, true friendships often deems them unattractive models for the prince’s relations. As Stuart Hampshire tells us, the virtues we tend to associate with “an admirable private life, such as loyal friendships”, have “their cost in political powerlessness” (1989: 165). Only a naïve or innocent prince would rely on lifelong friendships and unconditional loyalties. For, a prince “must come to ruin among so many who are not good”. Machiavelli’s cautionary warning to the prince is clear: one’s political fellows are “ungrateful, fickle, pretenders and dissemblers, evaders of danger and eager for gain” (*Prince*: 66). And because “other men are wicked and do not observe faith in you, you also do not have to observe faith in them” (*Prince*: 61). In short, it is the very features of political life which necessitate political relationships in the first place - the precariousness of order and stability, the struggle to amass power and the recognition that conflict is perpetual - which often render such relationships inherently fragile. And it is these very features which render hypocrisy necessary. This is glimpsed in Leo Strauss’ take on the Florentine’s ideas: “Machiavelli”, he writes, “contends that the same needs which make man dependent on other men compel him to form political societies the very preservation of which requires the practice of those virtues no less than that of their opposites” (1978: 264 - 265).

Hence, it is the twofold recognition that i) virtuous politics requires the formation of friendships with individuals or groups which one may despise and ii) that these friendships cannot be honoured, which renders hypocrisy necessary in politics. Whilst the prince is in need of the voluntary cooperation of others whose interests and aspirations do not necessarily coincide with his, such cooperation is not always forthcoming. Nor should one expect others to adhere to an altruistic behaviour; at the very minimum, both parties compete for the same, scarce good: power (Kis, 2008). A façade of moral idealism is thus necessary even for the most cynical political realism: the politician's dependence on political allies makes it necessary for him to flatter them and to appear before them as virtuous and trustworthy. And, if trust constitutes a necessary ingredient for such relationships, then forging and sustaining them becomes impossible if one openly expresses his disdain or honestly declares his intention to betray them when the time comes. Building and sustaining political relationships involves the necessity of making "false promises" (Machiavelli, *Prince*: 68 - 71). The term 'false' should be underlined here. For, even the least vicious but experienced politician, whilst making such promises or commitments is aware that their honouring is impossible.

To be sure, Machiavelli's argument is not restricted to relations between states or princes. It also applies to the prince's subjects as a whole. Since politics - princely or otherwise - involves a competition for power, a "civil war carried on by other means", as MacIntyre (2005: 253) puts it, one cannot engage in this practice without some support from the community. Machiavelli "would criticise anyone who, relying on his fortresses, thought it unimportant that his people hated him" (*Prince*: 67). Yet, we may wonder whether cultivating support through openness is possible or desirable; as indicated in chapters 4 and 5, Machiavelli and his heirs are clear that the community would be less appreciative if the prince openly reveals his vices and intentions, throwing its support to one's competitors who might know better how to conceal them (Hollis, 1982; Grant, 1997; Bellamy, 2010). And given that the peoples' interests and aspirations cannot be fully realized - for they need

not always coincide with those of the prince, nor, as I suggest in due course, with each other - the demos must be persuaded that the prince is virtuous, trustworthy and has their best interests at heart. This demands rhetoric, flattery and deceptive claims to an imaginary consistency and harmony of conflicting and incompatible interests and aspirations. Simply put, political relationships are relationships of dependence and require trust but since politicians cannot be always trustworthy or virtuous, hypocritical deception is inevitable. And because the virtuous practice of politics requires (the appearance of) morality and, at the same time, neither our moral aspirations nor moral and political life can be reconciled in a harmonious and perfect whole, hypocrisy is inevitable.

Thus, for Machiavelli, hypocrisy is a 'lesser vice'. On the one hand, the nature of political relations renders perfectly honest politics undesirable. On the other hand "to act as a roving bandit is not prudent nor is it politically or ethically intelligible" (Philp, 2001: 43). This point dovetails with a recognition I have advanced in chapter 5: for Machiavelli, the point of politics is not to reproduce "a war of all against all", to use Hobbes' term (*Leviathan*, 15.1). The Florentine's chief concern is how to secure the ends and goods of politics "with an economy of violence" (Whelan, 2004: 141; Wolin, 2004: 199). Machiavelli, Wolin tells us, "grasped the fact that popular consent represented a form of social power which, if properly exploited reduced the amount of violence" (2004: 199). This need not deny the necessity of cruelty and coercion altogether, especially when what Williams (2002a) terms 'the first question of politics' - that is, political stability, order and the provision of security, amongst others - is jeopardized. But it is not a mistake that Machiavelli is careful to distinguish between "cruelty well used" and "cruelty bad used" either (*Prince*: 37). "Cruelty bad used" or, what I shall alternatively term as, abstract cruelty entails the exhibition of brutality for the sake of certain utopian ideals at the expense of the realities of politics<sup>112</sup>. And, pre-

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<sup>112</sup> I should add that Machiavelli's distinction between "cruelty well used" and "cruelty bad used" also relates to the distinction I draw in the final section between the hypocrisy of

cisely because this type of cruelty ends up displacing politics it does not only deprive the Prince of 'glory'. Abstract cruelty and open knavery are also unlikely to allow for a stable rule and to help one to remain in power. Nor, by implication, is the continuous exhibition of these vices capable of sustaining political friendships. To act as a roving bandit would be to turn a blind eye to the subjects' negative desire to be protected and not to be perpetually oppressed. In so doing, one would run the danger of provoking the greatest threat for any government: hatred (Machiavelli, *Prince*, XIX; McCormick, 2001; Wolin, 2004). This would be the lion without the fox and it would not just be unappealing. It would also be severely lacking in *virtù* - especially in contemporary democratic politics.

#### 6. 4. 2. *Projecting Machiavelli's Insights on to Democratic Politics*

The obvious domain in which Machiavelli's insights on political friendships and hypocritical deception seem to immediately apply is international diplomacy. The shifting tactical alliances, the frequent betrayals and rivalries between modern states in an international realm that seeks to avert the cementation of binary oppositions and descent into warfare have always provided a fertile ground for illustrating Machiavelli's ideas. "The actions of states" Martin Jay (2008: 141) and Ruth Grant (1997: 41) write, always "take place within a particular moral horizon" and are "subject to ethical judgment". It is imperative for states to "attend to the way their actions will appear": they are required to "speak a moral language" so as to build useful alliances whilst, at the same time, exploiting "the opportunities to advance their aims" (Grant, 1997: 41; Jay, 2008: 141). Dependence between states in a pluralist *cosmos* where no single state possesses absolute and unconstrained power necessitates a willingness to hide their contempt and cooperate; to pretend to be trustworthy and to speak a common language, even if trustworthiness is impossible to maintain and even if their substantive aspirations and interests are conflicting and incompatible. The alliance be-

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innocence and the hypocrisy of experience. For, abstract cruelty and the hypocrisy of innocence have in common a certain naiveté and ignorance about the realities of politics.

tween the USSR, the US, and the UK forged against the common threat of fascism is, according to Jay (2008), indicative of this. For, in order to forge such an alliance, the Allies had to pretend that their mutual antipathies stemming from the struggle between communism and capitalism and their fundamentally different attitudes toward the maintenance of the British Empire did not matter; these were comfortably cast aside - only to intensify once the alliance was no longer useful to maintain and the Allies parted ways.

Whilst this may already suggest that the cultivation and, in certain circumstances, the exhibition of hypocrisy is necessary, it does not necessarily warrant the more specific argument I wish to pursue here: that liberal democratic societies are somehow implicated in promoting the necessity of hypocrisy - or that hypocrisy is an inevitable by-product of ordinary democratic politics - would be too quick a deduction to draw from the above argument (at least if it is taken on its own). Yet, the relatively under-theorized relationship between hypocrisy and ordinary democratic politics aside (apart from the utilization of the latter as a means to condemn the former), it is not hard to see how the Florentine's insights relate to ordinary democratic politics. Even though our ordinary democratic politics is perhaps less heroic and seemingly more mundane than in Machiavelli's era, it is no less complex and demanding. Democratic politics involves a struggle to secure some level of order and security, to transform power into authority, to achieve certain goals and policy outcomes which stem from one's particular tradition and to maintain tenure against competition and public opinion (Williams, 1978; Philp, 2001). Anyone who takes politics seriously, Janos Kis additionally tells us, has to "compete for the limited good of elected office" and possess "considerable capacities to win allies, to neutralize his enemies, to make good bargains" and "to use the means of threat effectively" (2008: 28 -29). In short, practitioners of democratic politics are embedded in complex webs of conflict and dependence. The necessity to 'build coalitions' and to 'build or mobilise the base' merely constitutes the democratic form of the prince's need for allies and supporters (Grant, 1997).

But it would also be hard to think of a less autonomous political actor than a democratic politician. Unable to take their support for granted and subject to frequent rituals of elections, democratic politicians must continuously seek the support of the demos and potential coalition partners. In order to achieve anything at all in democratic politics, politicians need the cooperation of a great many others and are far more dependent than their counterparts in inegalitarian, undemocratic regimes. And they need to be able to count on that cooperation over time by cultivating trust via the difficult art of persuasion and rhetoric—as opposed to open and brute coercion (Patapan & Kane, 2010; Markovits, 2008). “The language of democratic politics”, Grant tells us, “requires ‘You can count on me’ and ‘I know I can count on your support’” (1997: 45). However, as Shklar (1984) and Hampshire (1989; 1993) remind us, contemporary democratic societies are cultures of subcultures and traditions of traditions. In complex societies like ours, support can only be cultivated by appealing to diverse audiences, whose interests and conceptions of the good conflict and are irreconcilable with each other *and* with those of the politician. As Martin Hollis writes, democratic politics requires its practitioners to:

Keep a kind of faith with several groups, who lay conflicting claims of loyalty upon him. In our system a local councillor, for instance, must answer doctrinally to party workers in the language of the manifesto, must care pragmatically for the interests of constituents with words of common sense, must administer with the aid of officials in an Enlightenment language of reason, must manoeuvre humanely among pressure groups, each with its own single criterion of progress .... Each claim is legitimate; each sets a standard for what is best, which he will not meet. Confronted with this plurality of aims and of values and of languages, he can only plead that the best is the enemy of the good (1982: 396 - 397).

Democratic politicians, Hollis tells us, operate in a context where the competing and incompatible claims of different citizens, groups and traditions render the paying of lip service to values and the feigning of virtue difficult, if not impossible, to avoid. The impetus to hypo-

critical behaviour here stems from a recognition I have been stressing throughout the last three chapters of the thesis: leading a political life is inextricably intertwined with enduring and irresolvable moral conflicts and with difficult, but nonetheless inevitable, choices (or paradoxes of action). Any attempt to accommodate the competing and conflicting claims of each tradition is bound to result in a messy compromise and in the partial abandonment of some of those claims. Given that the interests and aspirations of such groups are plural, conflicting and irresolvable without remainder, the politician ‘can only (privately) plead that the best is the enemy of the good’: to secure even the basic goods of politics, he is required to preserve a moral front and persuade others of his *ex ante* impossible loyalty, trustworthiness and faithfulness.

But the recognition that liberal democratic politics takes place within a context of dependence, competing traditions and an ethos of multiplicity casts the necessity of hypocrisy even farther. No less fervent a proponent of liberal democracy than Shklar (using terms that echo Machiavelli and Hampshire) tells us that contemporary democratic societies are composed by an unruly assemblage of conflict-prone public figures: “we do not agree on the facts of social life and we heartily dislike one another’s religious, sexual, intellectual and political commitments - not to mention one another’s ethnic, racial and class ter”<sup>113</sup>(Shklar, 1984: 78). In short, members of each tradition are likely to look at each other with mutual suspicion and contempt. Political friendships in contemporary democratic politics are often characterized by no less disdain than those between the Allies in WWII or Renaissance princes. *Pace* Plato and his heirs, the building and sustaining of such friendships is possible neither because practitioners of democratic politics are motivated by a common set of substantial moral convictions or values nor because unconditional candour is a politi-

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113 It is surprising that Shklar, despite the affinities of her position with Machiavelli’s, unlike Hampshire and Berlin, does not align her thought with Machiavelli but denounces him. On this point see Whelan (2004) and Oakley and Cocking (2001).

cal virtue. “The democracy of everyday life”, Shklar tells us, “does not arise from sincerity”. Rather:

It is based on the pretence that we must speak to each other as if social standings were a matter of indifference in our views of each other. That is, of course, not true. Not all of us are even convinced that all men are entitled to a certain minimum of social respect. Only some of us think so. But most of us act as if we really did believe it, and that is what counts (Shklar, 1984: 77).

Since our everyday politics is a *logocentric* enterprise (Markovits, 2008), the cultivation of support and trust necessary is doomed to fail if practitioners of democratic politics do not engage with one another in a way that respects the customs and norms of social discourse - even if they despise their interlocutors and their values; and even if they do not necessarily agree with such norms and customs.

Hypocrisy is thus bound to be an inevitable “side effect” of “the politics of conversation” - and in particular of the practices of negotiation and debate as well as the arts of persuasion and rhetoric which are inherent in any open, pluralistic and competitive political system (Berkowitz, 1997: 37). In conditions of pluralism and dependence, such practices inevitably require “a certain amount of dissimulation” and hypocritical manipulation “on the part of all speakers” (Shklar, 1984: 48). These practices - and consequently hypocrisy - are not only an alternative to open cruelty, which is politically undesirable and not always possible but they also constitute an alternative to a politics of uncontaminated sincerity which might be equally corrosive. “One might well argue”, Shklar tells us, “that liberal democracy” and the practice of politics in conditions of dependence and pluralism “cannot afford public sincerity” (1984: 78). Zealous candour, Hannah Arendt stresses, possesses “a despotic” and “oppressive character”. Truth, in its mode of asserting validity, demands a once-and-for-all settlement: it peremptorily claims to be acknowledged and precludes debate, unresolved conflicts and negotiation which constitute the essence of political life (Arendt, 2000:

555-556). Indeed, if there is anything that the history of philosophy - and its affinities with the Platonic Ideal - shows, it is that the 'big truth' - the absolute and univocal truth - can be as oppressive and inimical to plurality and democratic politics as the 'big lie' or open cruelty.

At best, unconditional sincerity is bound to lead to a failure to build political relationships (Whelan, 2004; Waldron, 2011). This much is also acknowledged by the same Simmel who stressed the importance of trust in complex societies: "The morally negative value" of deception, he says, "must not blind us" from its "positive significance for the formation" of public relationships (Wolff, 1950: 336). For, the "forces of cooperation" necessary to sustain trust in contemporary societies are inevitably "interspersed with distance, competition" and "repulsion". And public "relationships being what they are" necessitate "a certain measure of concealment" (Wolff, 1950: 315- 316). The literature on negotiation pushes Simmel's point even further. For instance, Alan Strudler stresses that hypocritical deception and concealment "constitutes a signalling device" that people who "neither know nor trust each other", but are dependent on one another, can use to strike "mutually advantageous agreements in an otherwise risky environment" (1995: 805). Honest bargaining, negotiation theorists suggest, cannot be classified as bargaining at all (Raiffa, 1982; Steele, 1986; Frank, 1988; Peppet, 2002). It hampers any possibility of either negotiating or persuading others to cooperate or endorse (even reluctantly) one's proposed policies. Unconditional truthfulness would, in certain venues, bring discussion and negotiation to a halt; it will neither aid the reaching of mutually advantageous agreements on matters of shared importance, nor will it sustain political relationships.

This point is neatly captured in Arnold Schwarzenegger's announcement in 2007 that, as Governor of California, he had to change the way he would speak in public: "Attacking people and saying 'girlie men' and all those things . . . I didn't know any better . . . I've learned that there's a better way, and that is to bring people together, not insult them"

(Kane & Patapan, 2012: 74). Commentators such as George Skelton suggested that the Governor upgraded his verbal communication: “upgraded as in some signs of humility and less hubris. More charm without being cocky. Inflection in his voice, not bombast. Subdued rather than strident”. Schwarzenegger was now “fully the governor. No longer the Terminator” (Skelton 2007: 1). Skelton attributes this upgrade to the Governor’s previously ineffective acts of transparent bullying, which were “thrashed by voters in a special election on his reforms”. Schwarzenegger’s blatant and unreflective honesty was incompatible with political success and “the necessity of selling the public on sweeping health care and costly public works programs” (Skelton, 2007: 1).

At its worst, zealous candour - and, in particular “honesties that humiliate” - might jeopardize public order: it may “ruin democratic civility in a political society in which people have serious differences” (Shklar, 1984: 78). This need not deny that an open expression of disdain or the issuing of a threat is politically inappropriate *tout court*. But the adage that, if one does not have anything to say, it might be politically best to say nothing at all is also suggestive here; when silence is impossible, some hypocritical dissimulation might be the best one can do. At the very minimum, this can keep conversation going and facilitate both compromise and the building and sustainment of political relationships.

It is worth noting more clearly that my defence of hypocrisy as a political virtue is partially intertwined with a two-fold recognition that I shall explore and defend in chapter 7: i) that dependence renders compromise and negotiation an inevitable characteristic of political life and ii) that an overlapping consensus on substantive values and principles of justice in societies characterized by deep moral conflict is implausible, both in theory and in practice. What I seek to additionally emphasize here though, is that, given that compromise is inescapable and an overlapping consensus is impossible, it should not be a surprise that hypocrisy runs rampant during election campaigns:

Consider a politician running for President who declares that one of his priorities is to reform health care .... He promises a "National Health Insurance Exchange to help increase competition by insurers. He states his unequivocal opposition to any law that requires everyone to buy health insurance, an approach favoured by his main rival ... He promises that his health care reform "won't add a dime to the deficit and is paid for upfront." Although he presents himself as willing to "reach across the aisle" ... he offers no concessions at all during the campaign (Gutmann & Thompson, 2010: 1128).

This example bears a recognizable likeness to Obama in his 2008 presidential campaign. Whilst Sandel (2009) and others, saw Obama's election as "a great hope for moral renewal" arising from "restless impatience with politics as it is", Obama's reign was a confirmation of ordinary politics. For, Obama's pre-election commitments to health care reform were a far cry from the 2010 Affordable Care Act; the latter, which was the product of a compromise between Republicans and Democrats, contained elements to which Obama was strongly opposed during his campaign. And whilst the cries of hypocrisy were heard loudly (especially by those who shared Sandel's optimism), it is hard to imagine any political candidate openly proclaiming his willingness to abandon or betray some of his commitments once elected.

The reason for this is simple: candidates are ineffective in mobilizing and gaining the trust of supporters if they talk about prudent compromises or honestly confess that their steadfast commitments are never going to materialize *tout court* (Gutmann & Thompson, 2010; 2012; Boudreaux & Lee, 1997). Despite our obsession with 'straight shooters', it is even more difficult for us to trust, let alone to be inspired by, a politician who is openly vicious and cynical; in addition to the insights of the standard DH thesis and the public reception of Schwarzenegger's transparent bullying, Pullman et al's recent crusade for innocence in public life<sup>114</sup>, as well as Hugo's abhorrence towards Hoerderer's testament of his com-

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<sup>114</sup> See chapters 1 and 5.

promise are suggestive here<sup>115</sup>. Again, what is important to note here is that support cannot be cultivated without some form of hypocrisy and without an appeal to an unattainable idealism or virtue: success in a campaign depends on a public reaffirmation of an uncompromising and consistent commitment to core principles or high-minded ideals, combined with a private acknowledgement that these cannot be *fully* realized. To refuse to cultivate and exhibit hypocrisy would, in Bernard Williams words, mean that “one cannot seriously pursue even” some of “the moral ends of politics” (1978: 62).

A more general way of putting this is to acknowledge that few, if any, campaigns would be successful if democratic politicians fail to inspire the majority of a nation with a vision of collective social hope (and that they can be entrusted with the task of its implementation). But, in societies characterized by deep conflicts, “there is in principle no basis for collective hope”. For “your justice is, not my justice; the fulfilment of your hopes is the disappointment of mine” (Edyvane, 2013: 118 - 119). In short, since a homogenous majority based on a harmony of shared substantive values and interests is impossible, democratic politicians are required to cultivate support on the basis of fictitious commonalities. Hypocrisy is inevitable as the practice of building and sustaining political relationships entails the public proclamation of, or commitment to, a vision which presupposes shared values, aspirations and interests combined with a private acknowledgement of their hollowness and unfeasibility - that the vision is a fiction and that, at best, its realisation is bound to be partial, shabby and compromised.

So, in this section, I sought to draw on Machiavelli’s insights on political relationships and the necessity of hypocrisy and to project these on to the context of ordinary democratic politics. In so doing, I have tried to illustrate that if hypocrisy is understood as the wearing of a mask or the putting on of a theatrical act, politics - especially in its democratic form - will certainly always be hypocritical. This is the paradox of democracy. Because lib-

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<sup>115</sup> See Sartre (1989). I say more on this in chapter 7.

eral democracies uphold certain ideals - such as egalitarianism, trust and accountability - they will abhor hypocrisy. But on account of these very values they will continue to generate it. And because liberal democratic politics is typically thought to be capable of providing open and transparent political processes and rituals - such as elections and conversation or debate - they will abhor hypocrisy. But because ordinary democratic politics relies on such processes and rituals as a means of structuring power-struggles, it will continue to necessitate it. For, democratic politics takes place in a context of a plurality of conflicting and incompatible interests and aspirations and is structured in such a way that dependencies conducive to hypocrisy are increased. "Where all are equal", or at least thought to be so, Grant tells us, "no one can go it alone" (1997: 176). In democratic politics, it is neither possible nor desirable for a politician to rise to power and rule by relying "on his arms", to invoke Machiavelli's phrase (*Prince*: 96). Nor would open candour sustain political friendships and the support necessary to pursue certain political ends.

To put it simply, then, hypocrisy is a contemporary political virtue. It enables democratic politicians to cultivate support, build coalitions and advance some of their preferred policies; it can also aid the maintenance of some modicum of civility and cooperation amidst conditions of conflict and competition. The cultivation and exhibition of hypocrisy also allows for the sustainment of a shared public space, in which practitioners of democratic politics can move, carry on discourse and reach agreements on matters in which they have a stake, whilst pretending to leave their differences and antipathies in abeyance.

The implications of the points I have been trying to make here are quite profound and sometimes explicitly accepted. Bernard Mandeville's infamous contention in *The Fable of Bees* that private or ordinary vices constitute political virtues is a prominent example. As he tells us, we should "leave complaints" aside. For "only Fools strive to make an honest hive". Hypocrisy, Mandeville suggests, is "utterly" necessary: it constitutes the glue that holds political relationships together (1924: 36). What follows from this is that, if hypocrisy

is a by-product of liberal democratic politics, a failure to cultivate and exhibit it is not just intertwined with a failure to lead a virtuous political life. Rather, the longing for a moralistic and unbroken democratic politics of unconditional transparency, openness and truthfulness - a romantic nostalgia for an imaginary harmony and wholeness - is incompatible with the context in which democratic politicians operate. This is not just because the practice of democratic politics, even in its least vicious manifestations, involves an element of coercion which should not be too readily publically displayed - or, as Theodor Adorno observed in *Minima Moralia*, that it is only totalitarian governments which openly proclaim “the principle of domination that is elsewhere concealed” (1974: 108). The incompatibility of democratic politics with perfect candour is such that the aspiration to eliminate hypocrisy from ordinary politics once and for all might well corrode the democratic character of our political arrangements. On the one hand, the satisfaction of our enduring appetite for more transparent public officials would inevitably require more autonomy for democratic politicians. But, as Grant reminds us, “it is precisely because politicians depend on supporters and coalition partners” to bring about some of their ends, “and because they remain beholden to them for their support, that they can be held [imperfectly] accountable and the system can maintain its democratic character” in the first place (1997: 54). On the other hand, to eliminate hypocrisy from political life would, at best, require the elimination of political discourse *tout court* - or, at least, one would have to create a harmonious and homogenous community where the political character of politics is eliminated; at worse, it would lead to the almost complete erosion of public order.

In what follows, I want to push some of these implications a bit further. I want to suggest that extirpating hypocrisy would not merely jeopardize our current political arrangements. Rather, the very desire to wriggle free from it runs the danger of being incoherent and self-defeating. For, it is not the case that extirpating hypocrisy is possible but our current political arrangements do not allow this. What is alarming about hypocrisy is that

the more one tries to break away from it the more hypocritical, unfit for and dangerous to contemporary democratic life one becomes.

### **6. 5. The Quest for Anti-hypocrisy: The Hypocrisy of Innocence**

The hypocrisy I have discussed and defended so far might be termed the *hypocrisy of experience*. Experience, I suggested in previous chapters, entails a certain kind of knowledge which is the *sine qua non* of Machiavelli's *virtù*: knowledge about the unpleasant realities of political life, an awareness of its ends and an understanding of how to wield and use political power to achieve those ends. Unlike Walzer's politician, Machiavelli's politician does not gaze at the future with the innocent and hopeful aspiration of salvation or perfection; this has been relinquished by the time he decided to pursue a life of politics. The hypocrisy which Machiavelli advises practitioners of politics to cultivate and exhibit is calculating and clear-eyed; an experienced hypocrite is self-conscious and cognizant that his hypocrisy constitutes a useful political tool. Despite being nothing less than a conman, Machiavelli's hypocrite is self-conscious: he deceives his audience but he is not untruthful or hypocritical to himself about his vices.

But hypocrisy is not inescapable only for those who have earnestly taken Machiavelli's infamous advice to heart. Not all hypocrites are self-conscious. Nor is the hypocrisy of experience the only style of hypocrisy. There exists a second type of hypocrisy which is often ignored by critics of this vice and which does not preclude innocence: it presupposes it. And, as I shall suggest in due course, failure to distinguish between these two types of hypocrisy coupled with the innocent belief in a perfectly transparent and sincere politics has serious, indeed potentially disastrous, political implications. To be sure, the innocent hypocrite shares with the experienced hypocrite this much: they both wear masks. But the latter knows himself for what he is: his mask is worn deliberately to *deceive others*. This

knowledge is lacking in the former - his mask is so compelling that *he deceives himself*<sup>116</sup>. This point sits well with an argument I advanced in chapter 4 - that innocence involves an absence of knowledge - but extends it further: the innocent not only lack knowledge about politics; they also *lack knowledge of themselves*.

What is striking about the hypocrisy of innocence is that it is those who cannot tolerate, and seek to liberate themselves from, the vices that are most prone to exhibiting it. As Shklar tells us, “the more conscience rails against hypocrisy, the more it encourages the vice”. The quest for anti-hypocrisy demands “an ever more complete reliance on the conscience’s own supremacy and inwardness ... that forces one into hypocrisy” (1978: 192 - 193). In short, the hypocrisy of innocence is exemplified by those who put hypocrisy first—those modern practitioners of politics who have “some inner vision of a transformed humanity” and like to think of themselves as “one of these purer and better beings” and imagine “that in the past or in the future a better version of mankind” and politics “did or will exist” (Shklar, 1984: 194). Whilst the notion of the unselfconscious and innocent hypocrite may seem paradoxical, the phenomenon of self-deception is far from uncommon; the anorexic who is neither capable of acknowledging her anorexia nor acknowledge her failure to acknowledge it comes readily to mind here.

This type of hypocrisy is famously captured by Moliere in *The Misanthrope*, in his portrayal of Alceste: “there’s nothing more I detest like the contortions, of all these great dispensers of lip service” he says; it “reduces me to utter despair to see men living as they do. I meet with nothing but base flattery... villainy everywhere. I can’t stand it anymore” (Moliere, 2000: 97). Alceste’s disgust with the hypocrisy of public life steers him to commit wholeheartedly to the development of his chief talents: frankness, sincerity and the exposure of the hypocrisies of his contemporaries. As Rousseau (2004) laments, *The Misanthrope*

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116 What I term here as the hypocrisy of innocence has parallels with what Runciman (2008) terms second-order hypocrisy.

does not provide us with a sketch of the perfectly virtuous man. Nor did Moliere wish to correct the vices but only what is ridiculous. But, in line with the insights of the dynamic account, Moliere's reason for avoiding this is because the Diogenic search for this individual is futile, precisely because this individual is impossible. Alceste is not ridiculed by Moliere because he is virtuous as Rousseau complains<sup>117</sup>. Alceste is ridiculous because he innocently *believes* that he is virtuous.

Pliny the Younger's remark that "he who hates vice hates mankind" already suggests some of the reasons as to why Alceste's belief that he constitutes a paragon of perfection is misplaced (quoted in Shklar, 1984: 192). But whilst Alceste's misanthropy plants a question mark over his sense of perfection, it is not his misanthropy *per se* that constitutes the most troubling and dangerous quality of his character. Indeed, like hypocrisy, misanthropy is, as I gestured in the previous section, neither evadable in, nor - as Shklar (1984) and Edyvane (2012) suggest - necessarily destructive for political life. To contain its destructiveness though, one is required to maintain an acute awareness of what Williams (2002a) terms the first question of politics (the need for a modicum of order, stability and security), an acknowledgement that individual and societal perfection is impossible and that public life, with all its interdependencies, renders hypocrisy necessary. These are touched on by the experienced Philinte who tells Alceste that "like you, I observe many times each day things which could be better if they were done differently. But whatever I happen to see, I don't show my irritation openly as you do." For "in certain cases it would be uncouth and most absurd to speak the naked truth ... It is often best to veil one's true emotions. Wouldn't the social fabric come undone if we were wholly frank with everyone? (Moliere, 1993: 19). For Alceste none of this matters - all that matters to him is an abstract truthfulness and an impossible perfection. Obduracy with perfection and anti-hypocrisy deems innocent hypocrites so preoccupied with uncovering the vices and hypocrisies of others that

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<sup>117</sup> See also Trilling (1972).

they fail to subject their own views to reflection; this amounts to outright hubris: the state in which truth is obscured through the ascendancy of self-regarding will over *phronesis* and experience.

Shklar's and Moliere's depiction of the innocent hypocrite captures well some of contemporary calls for perfection and innocence as well as the cries of despair against hypocrisy and the vices I documented in chapter 1 and here respectively. It also issues a cautionary warning against both such despair and the calls for absolute virtue and innocence that accompany the narrative of crisis. For, in contrast to the hypocrisy of experience, the hypocrisy of innocence is much more unfit for, even dangerous to, politics. This point is related to the argument I have advanced in chapter 4: innocence is not something which awaits to be tragically tainted - it constitutes a source of tragedy and political disaster. This insight also emerges from the argument I advanced in the previous section - that unconditional truthfulness, a feature of the hypocrisy of innocence, does little to sustain the practice of democratic politics. There is, however, more to be said here. At best, the quest for perfection and anti-hypocrisy might additionally provoke withdrawal from political life; like Rousseau, Alceste repeatedly declares his need to "escape from the abyss where vice reigns triumphant" and "find some solitary place and avoid all contact with humankind" (Moliere, 2000, 98 - 114). Walzer's politician, who embarks on the quest for politics with the innocent aspiration that the virtues of morality and politics can be harmonized, also comes to mind: his inability to realize that cultivating the vices - especially hypocrisy - is necessary for politics provokes his political exodus so as to regain purification. This, of course, is far from a virtuous life, especially for the individual who wants to commit himself to the practice of politics.

At worst, the hypocrisy of innocence might jeopardize political order and stability: it may "easily spill over into the violent will" to extirpate hypocrisy and the vices altogether and "demolish the corrupt society and to establish in its place a new way of living"

(Edyvane, 2012: 5). Edyvane's remark brings to mind Robespierre; like Alceste, Robespierre prided himself on being 'incorruptible', a perfectly virtuous human species and an enemy of hypocrisy, the vice he abhorred the most. As Arendt notes, "the momentous role that hypocrisy and the passion for its unmasking came to play in the French Revolution, though it may never cease to astound the historian, is a matter of historical record" (1990: 98). It was the 'incorruptible's' war upon hypocrisy which gave rise to the Reign of Terror or, what Arendt calls, the 'terror of virtue'. This was a war directed against political society *en masse* and against a hidden enemy - a hidden vice. And it was futile not just because perfection is unfeasible, but because the hidden nature of hypocrisy deems its unmasking insurmountable; the demand that everybody display in public life "their innermost motivation demands the impossible". The terror of virtue was boundless, a hunt for witches and unicorns, as "the hunt for hypocrites is boundless by nature" (Arendt, 1990: 98 - 100). "This misplaced emphasis on the heart as the source of political virtue," Arendt writes, and the quest to eradicate hypocrisy from public life, are together a recipe for madness. Needless to say, the enterprise was also far from politically virtuous, let alone democratic. To be sure, just as our demands to purify the public stage from the vicious and the hypocrites once and for all, such terror was enacted in good faith. But, "the search for perfection", Berlin tells us, "is a recipe for bloodshed, no better even it is demanded by the sincerest of idealists, the purest of heart" (1990a: 18). Innocent intentions and utopian ideals, Machiavelli reminds us, never succeed in politics. Robespierre's unrestrained quest for perfection resulted in a forlorn and abstract cruelty - the epitome of "cruelty bad used". And whilst his innocent hypocrisy is hardly an issue when one considers his cruelty, it is remarkable how the latter was the product of the former.

## **6. 6. Conclusion**

My general aim in this chapter was to suggest that the core insights of the dynamic account of DH constitute a real and inescapable issue for contemporary democratic politics.

In advancing this claim, I turned to the examination of hypocrisy. In particular, I suggested that hypocrisy is necessary for the practice of our ordinary and seemingly mundane democratic politics. The argument I advanced here somewhat bridges what Mendus (2009b) identifies as a peculiar divide in the contemporary literature of political morality and DH: those who focus on political character - and endorse imperfection and dirtiness as an inevitable by-product of politics - and those who focus on contemporary institutional structures and processes - and thereby condemn both imperfection and dirtiness as democratically undesirable and unacceptable. Whilst hypocrisy poses serious challenges for the practice of contemporary politics, to assume that democratic politics is *tout court* inhospitable to hypocrisy is unsatisfactory. Nor is it the case that our politics can ever be purged of hypocrisy - or, at least, some manifestations of it: what I termed the hypocrisy of experience. For, as I suggested, democratic societies are implicated in promoting hypocrisy; it is, in short, the very processes, structures and values inherent in democratic societies coupled with the nature of political relationships amidst conditions of conflict and pluralism which exacerbate the necessity of hypocrisy. To seek to liberate oneself and democratic politics from hypocrisy would not merely jeopardize the democratic character of our political arrangements. The innocent aspiration to wriggle free from this vice is self-defeating and may have disastrous political implications: the more one tries to extirpate hypocrisy the more hypocritical and dangerous to contemporary public life one becomes.

It is important to acknowledge here that the account of hypocrisy I have presented in this chapter is closely intertwined with the necessity and inevitability of compromise in contemporary public life - or, the impossibility of an overlapping consensus of values. Differently put, my defence of dynamic DH and hypocrisy - and, in particular, my contention that this vice constitutes the glue that holds together a virtuous political life - is bound to be partial and incomplete without acknowledging the value and necessity of compromise in ordinary politics. For, if an overlapping consensus on substantive values or principles of

justice is philosophically possible - if, in other words, it is conceivable for reasonable agents to perfectly resolve their disagreements by appeal to a shared conception of justice - there would be no need for compromise and betrayal. Nor would there be any need for the hypocritical concealment of these vices. The point here is that, in the absence of an explicit defence of compromise in contemporary politics, we cannot fully make sense of the distinctive nature of political integrity. Simply put, if external conflicts or disagreements amongst politicians can be reasonably resolved without remainder - if it is, in short, possible for politicians to materialize their commitments and pre-election promises *in toto* - the central insights of the dynamic account of DH seem less plausible: political integrity is no different from moral integrity or, what Hollis (1982) and Mendus (2009a), term the integrity and consistency of the saint. It is to the exploration of these issues - and to the defence of a compromising disposition as a political virtue and of the centrality of compromise to political integrity - I now turn.

## 7. Dynamic DH and Democratic Politics Continued: Compromise, Integrity and the Ambiguities of Betrayal

*There can be no compromise on basic principles or fundamental issues...  
when people speak of 'compromise' what they mean is not a legitimate  
mutual concession or a trade, but precisely a betrayal of their principles.*

A. Rand<sup>118</sup>

### 7.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I suggested that the insights of the dynamic account of DH have significant implications for our ordinary politics. In connection to this, I turned my attention to the explicit examination of the vices - and, in particular, to hypocrisy. But, as I have indicated, my account of hypocrisy and dynamic DH in contemporary politics is bound to be incomplete without acknowledging the necessity and value of compromise. And, in the absence of such recognition, we cannot fully capture the distinctive nature of political integrity either. So, my general aim in this chapter is this: I want to argue that compromise is necessary and inescapable in contemporary public life and that acknowledging this helps us make better sense of political integrity.

That compromise is necessary in politics may appear an anodyne claim. After all, politics - especially in its democratic form - is known as the 'art of compromise' (Wittman, 1995; Elshtain, 1995). This point however, is not as obvious as one might suspect. Despite being widely practiced, compromise is largely ignored by philosophers in general (Golding, 1979; Day, 1989; Bellamy et al, 2012) and standard DH theorists in particular, who purport to capture the nuances of our moral reality. "It is probably the mistrust of this notion", Mohamed Nachi suggests, "that is to blame for the relatively few studies on compromise"

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<sup>118</sup> *The Virtue of Selfishness*, 64

(2004: 493). The way compromise is typically received by philosophers sits well with the moralistic account of political ethics which this thesis resists: political philosophers invoke the notion of compromise with the purpose of rejecting it (Horton, 2009; Neal, 1993). At best, ideal theorists such as John Rawls who claim to be sensitive to pluralism and conflict treat compromise as an unnecessary feature of democratic politics. Political agreements are thought to be just and reasonable only if they reflect an overlapping consensus, as opposed to a 'mere' compromise. "Compromise", writes Avishai Margalit, seems "messy, the dreary stuff of day-to-day politics" (2012: 5- 6). At worst, its practitioners are degraded as totally unjust and unprincipled: compromise, Martin Benjamin tells us, is often "regarded as a sign of weakness, *the lack of integrity*" (1990: 1; my emphasis). In addition to Rand's remark in the title quote, H. L. Mencken's scorn for compromise is suggestive. "A politician", he writes, "has to make so many compromises that he becomes indistinguishable from a streetwalker" (1946: 4). A 'compromising disposition'<sup>119</sup>, Mencken suggests, constitutes a dangerous vice: practitioners of compromise are incapable of pursuing an integrated life.

This negative perception of compromise is not limited within the confines of philosophical analysis. Consider for instance some of the headlines of the 2010 Liberal Democrat and Conservative Coalition which required both parties to abandon some of their pre-election pledges<sup>120</sup>. *The Guardian* reports that "Nick Clegg ... the leader of the party with a manifesto commitment to 'clean up' politics became tarnished by the constant tinkle of apparently broken promises" (Jack, 2012: 2). "The coalition government", Wilby adds, "brought betrayals of manifesto commitments that ... are unprecedented in British politics" (2012: 1). "Tuition fees vote: Hypocrisy and betrayal by Pinocchio Nick Clegg" reports *The Mirror* (2012). "No leader in modern politics", it adds, "betrayed voters as quickly and

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<sup>119</sup> I borrow this term from Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson (2012).

<sup>120</sup> These accusations, one may retort, are not targeted against Clegg's compromise *per se* but his hypocrisy. Whilst there is an element of truth in this, compromise and hypocrisy are interconnected and cannot be disjointed *tout court* whilst assessing the lives politicians lead.

cynically as this man. Clegg sold his principles and his party's soul for a fancy title” (*Mirror*, 2012). Finally, *The New Statesman* suggests that Clegg’s ‘selling out’ was a profound example of politicians’ lack of integrity (Elmhirst, 2010).

To be clear, it is not my intention to examine the rights and wrongs of this - or indeed any - compromise *per se*. Nor do I wish to suggest that compromise does not pose serious challenges to the practice of democratic politics. What I do want to emphasize here is that the above remarks bring to the fore a rather odd paradox: the claim that politics is the art of compromise is a platitude, and yet we seem profoundly allergic to compromise in politics when it happens. In this chapter, I want to explore this paradox. In particular, I want to suggest that: i) compromise is an ambiguous and fox-like public virtue - something which is politically expedient but not necessarily morally admirable; ii) a willingness to compromise, whilst uncongenial to moral integrity, constitutes an essential part of the integrity of practitioners of democratic politics.

The argument is advanced in two phases. First, I shall provide a preliminary examination of compromise, so as to set the context for the subsequent discussion. In particular, I wish to consider how it differs from the notion of consensus, which has received rather more attention from political theorists. I shall then argue that attempts to deny the necessity and value of compromise in ordinary politics misconstrue the realities of politics and idealize the messy context in which politicians operate. They also mischaracterize the life public officials lead and the nature of political integrity. In doing so, I shall build on the argument I advanced in the previous chapters: that making sense of political ethics and DH also entails taking the context in which politicians operate seriously. To put it differently, the standards of political excellence arise from *within* politics as opposed to any external abstract moral standpoint. In this sense, the rupture between a moral and political life is partially conditioned on the recognition that conflict is also manifested externally: between different political agents or groups. Politicians are not self-sufficient:

they operate in a domain of conflict and dependence which shapes the virtues conducive to virtuous political practice. And it is precisely this recognition which renders compromise an inescapable feature of ordinary politics and a crucial aspect of political integrity. For, whilst commitment to a set of principles which stem from one's tradition or pre-election promises implies a commitment to seeing them realized, the practice of politics in conditions of interdependence, pluralism and conflict often requires compromising and partially abandoning those principles. An innocent and all-or-nothing pursuit of one's principles in politics is bound to promote abstract cruelty - and thereby jeopardize order and stability - or lead to defeat: a rigid refusal to compromise one's principles would entail the entire abandonment of any hope of realizing some of these principles.

## **7.2. Compromise: A Preliminary Consideration**

Compromise refers to "the settlement of a dispute by which each side gives up something it has asked for and neither side gets all it has asked for" (*OED*, 1901). This definition uncovers two interrelated interpretations of compromise. Its first part conceives of compromise as an agreement. The second part alludes to certain processes pursued by each side to effect this agreement: compromise is a means of reaching an agreement. Simply stated, a compromise constitutes a "type of outcome of a conflict" and "a process for resolving conflict" (Benjamin, 1990: 4). A precondition of any compromise, then, is the existence of interpersonal conflict: situations where individuals have decided which position or course dovetails with their best judgement, but who find themselves in opposition to others whose judgment has led them to a conflicting position.

The question which merits more scrutiny here though - especially if we are to discern the distinct characteristics of compromise and capture some of the charges so often levelled against it - is this: if a compromise constitutes an agreement in the face of external

conflict, how does it differ from the notion of a political consensus<sup>121</sup>? On the face of it, both notions seem similar - or, they seem to rest on similar presuppositions. In *Political Liberalism*, John Rawls tells us that contemporary societies are characterized by a “plurality of conflicting and incommensurable conceptions of the meaning, value and purpose of human life”. Pluralism, he maintains, is “a permanent feature of the public culture of democracy” (1996: 36). In our societies, none of these comprehensive doctrines, traditions and aspirations is generally affirmed. Nor “should one expect that in the foreseeable future one of them” will ever “be affirmed by all or nearly all reasonable” public figures (Rawls, 1996: xvi). Disagreement about the good is reasonable as our judgement is burdened. For instance, different public agents are expected to reach different conclusions from the same stock of evidence. In addition, the way evidence and values are assessed depend on one’s life experiences; and, since life experiences differ, we expect public agents to reach different judgements<sup>122</sup>. Thus, whilst reasonable individuals might be motivated to reach agreement about the good, they will fail to do so.

However, Rawls contends that, this does not preclude agreement among reasonable public agents on a *shared and substantive conception of justice or fairness*. “The idea of an

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121 I should highlight two issues here. First, my analysis depends on how one reads Rawls. Some philosophers, such as Richard Rorty (1991), interpret Rawls’ position as closer to my description of compromise. However, as John Horton suggests, “it is doubtful whether Rawls would have accepted” this “as an accurate account of his position” (2010: 10). Second, Rawls’ discussion focuses on the question of political stability and mostly applies to relationships between democratic citizens as opposed to relationships between professional politicians (who are the focus of this thesis). Nonetheless, if a consensus amongst reasonable citizens is conceptually plausible as Rawls claims, there is no reason to suppose that it might not be plausible for reasonable politicians as well. And since, as I explain, the point of a consensus is to foster social unity under the aegis of reason, there is no reason to believe that Rawls’ discussion should not apply to broader political questions.

122 This is a partial summary on how the burdens of judgement affect agreement about the good. See Rawls (1996: 56 -57).

overlapping consensus”, Rawls writes, enables a regime “characterized by the fact of pluralism” to “achieve stability and social unity by the public recognition of a reasonable political conception of justice” (1987: 2). The upshot of this, Bernard Dauenhauer explains, is that an overlapping consensus is assumed to be capable of “accommodating the existence of a multiplicity of reasonable doctrines” (2000: 207). In short, a consensus is reached when the parties involved agree with respect to their opinions or when their aspirations are congruent with an overarching conception of fairness (Zanetti, 2011; Leif, 2012; van Parijs, 2012). As Rawls puts it, an overlapping consensus “is not viewed as incompatible with basic religious, philosophical, and moral values”. For “there are many reasonable comprehensive doctrines that understand the wider realm of values to be (a) congruent with, or (b) supportive of, or (c) not in conflict with, political values as these are specified by a political conception of justice for a democratic regime” (1996: 157; 169). Suppose, for instance, that a cake needs to be split between you and me in circumstances in which we would each like to eat the whole thing. If we both share the same conception of fairness (i.e. we agree that splitting the cake in half is fair and reasonable) a consensus-based agreement would be possible. “As a reasoned response to a political or social question”, Bellamy et al tell us, “a consensus not only resolves the situation of conflict itself; the reasons of the conflict will also have been deliberated away”<sup>123</sup> (2012: 284). Hence, the belief in the possibility of consensus - whilst presupposing the existence of *prima facie* irreducible pluralism and conflict - is underpinned by the assumption that a tidy agreement (which is congruent with such a plurality) does exist.

This point marks an important difference between the two concepts. For, whilst a compromise is seen as a solution to external conflicts, it is far from a tidy agreement. In a manner reminiscent of the insights of the dynamic account of DH, Roy aptly points out that “the chief characteristic of a political problem [which is solved, so to speak, via a

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<sup>123</sup> See also Ankersmit (2002) and Gutmann and Thompson (2012).

compromise] is that it is insoluble” (1990: 330). To return to the stylized example of splitting the cake, if both of us appeal to different conceptions of fairness - if I claim the entire cake because I baked it, whereas your claim is premised on the fact that you have been on a diet - a consensus is unattainable precisely because disagreement cuts much deeper: it goes all the way down to principles of justice. And, it is in these instances where a compromise is feasible. A compromise, David Archard explains, shows that “the disagreement is not ambivalence or uncertainty on the part of some”. There exists “real and substantive disagreement” and “there is no overlapping consensus in Rawls’ sense” (2012: 405). In short, the pursuit of compromise is underpinned by the assumption that an overlapping consensus is, in some sense, unattainable - and this, as I explain, constitutes one of the reasons why compromise is necessary in politics.

In contrast to a consensus then, a compromise “cannot do away with the underlying grounds of controversy” (Bellamy et al, 2012: 298). Whilst a compromise is often intertwined with peace, it entails neither a ‘peace’ nor a ‘final rational harmony’ in the Kantian or Platonic sense of suppression of conflict: the grounds of the conflict, and the conflict itself, do not evaporate once an agreement is reached (Bellamy & Hollis, 2007; Hirschman, 1994). In this sense, a compromise resembles a notion which Rawls rejects: a *modus vivendi*, a pragmatic arrangement between groups “that affects a workable compromise on issues in dispute without permanently settling them” (Dauenhauer, 2000: 219). A *modus vivendi*, according to Rawls, is- by virtue of its very nature - “political in the wrong way”: its form and content are “affected by the existing balance of political power” (1996: 142). In contrast, an overlapping consensus involves “a balance of reasons as seen within each citizen’s comprehensive doctrine and not a compromise compelled by circumstances” (Rawls, 1996: 169). Or, as he puts it in *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, “as a liberal conception, justice as fairness is concerned with stability in a different way. Finding a stable conception is not simply a matter of avoiding futility. Rather, what counts

is the kind of stability, the nature of forces that secure it” (2001: 185). What is worth emphasizing more clearly here then, is that Rawls’ consensus is much more morally demanding (Horton, 2009). For, Rawls thinks that in contemporary societies, the parameters of any political agreement or relationship should be regulated by quite determinate and substantive principles of justice. In a compromise though, no substantive values or principles of justice are mutually acceptable to, and perfectly consistent with, each party’s interests or aspirations: the parties cooperate only because they believe that doing so constitutes a ‘lesser evil’<sup>124</sup>. To be sure, this need not deny that the outcome of a particular compromise could be similar to the outcome of an overlapping consensus (i.e. the parties might still decide to divide the cake evenly even if they do not believe that this is substantially just). But, in the absence of a common set of substantive values, the terms of compromise-based agreements are bound to be much more open. In compromises, Archard tells us, the difference “may be split closer to one of the disputants’ starting point than to others” (2012: 403); one party can get more out of the deal relative to its initial claim *vis-à-vis* what the other party manages to get out relative to its initial claim<sup>125</sup>. Hence, the account of compromise presented here is very thin in terms of any substantive content.

It is worth adding that, because compromise “has nothing to with the abandonment or the mere denial of conflictuality”, in compromise-based agreements each party gains something but not everything (Arnsperger & Picavet, 2004: 168). As Smith puts it “each party to a conflict gives up something dear, but not invaluable, in order to get something which is truly invaluable” (1956: 45). This remark suggests that compromise shares some common elements with the orthodox interpretation of the DH problem: this phenomenon constitutes a paradox of action, whereby something of value is sacrificed at the expense of

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124 In this sense, my account of compromise is closer to what Shklar (1989) and Williams (2002a) call ‘the liberalism of fear’ than Rawls’ liberalism: it is about damage control.

125 The terms of each agreement depend on various factors (i.e. each party’s bargaining power and skills). See Schelling (1956).

something else<sup>126</sup>. Differently put, in compromises people refrain from doing what they consider the *tout court* right thing to do: they settle for a course of action which simultaneously contains elements of rightfulness and wrongfulness.

And yet, despite the similarities between compromise and the standard DH thesis, DH theorists have devoted little attention to compromise. To be clear, I do not wish suggest that the word compromise does not feature in standard discussions of DH *at all*. A breezy reading of the literature on DH seems to reveal that standard DH theorists tend to utilize compromise in the rather pejorative sense I explore in the next section: compromise is akin to betrayal (c.f. de Wijze, 2009; Blattberg, 2013). This much also follows from my discussion of the standard DH thesis in chapter 3: the departing assumption of such a thesis is an innocent man who, once confronted with a momentous paradox of action, is forced to compromise his principles. What I want to suggest here however, is that standard DH theorists fail to capture compromise in all its complexity. And, this should not surprise us. For, compromise is bound to remain elusive for the heirs of Plato and the Enlightenment who seek to suppress individual and societal conflict through the derivation of abstract, universal and harmonious sets of principles upon which all rational agents ought to ascend. By implication, it is also bound to remain elusive for the standard DH thesis.

As I have demonstrated in chapter 4, the standard DH thesis is unsatisfactorily static and idealistic: the static conception of DH is maintained at the cost of ignoring *the extent* and *the nature* of the conflict between morality and politics. In short, the standard DH thesis fails to capture Machiavelli's recognition that the rupture between morality and politics is

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126 This point sits neatly with John Morley's (1886) remark that compromise is akin to toleration. This is not merely because toleration entails a capacity to endure something which one believes to be wrong. Rather, toleration and, as I suggest, compromise are ambiguous virtues: they are pragmatically necessary but they are not necessarily morally admirable.

perpetual and involves a conflict between at least two entire and exhaustive ways of life. It also conveniently ignores some of the ways in which this conflict occurs and is sustained through time. For, proponents of the standard DH thesis conceive DH as a momentous conflict that confronts a philosophical nobody: this is an agent who comes to his choices ethically naked - without a pattern of experiences formed by his particular history and affiliation with a particular tradition - and who is detached from the real sociological context in which she operates. In short, it is not just, as Stephen Garrett (1996) suggests that the standard DH thesis ignores the diversity of input that goes into certain policy decisions. Rather, the DH thesis also conveniently ignores that certain policy decisions are themselves the product of external moral conflict.

The point here is that the standard DH thesis is bound to misconceive compromise precisely because it misconceives pluralism and conflict - both in individual and societal ethics. The tendency to cast DH in terms of abstract and universal consequentialist or deontological moral principles makes little room for the recognition that politicians are members of a particular tradition and that their interests and aspirations may conflict with those of their political interlocutors. Differently put, by virtue of its conception of morality in terms of universal deontological and consequentialist rules, the static account idealizes the messy domain in which politicians operate. Nor can the standard DH thesis confront the point I wish to advance here: since practitioners of politics operate in conditions of perpetual conflict and dependence, a preparedness to forgo some of one's aspirations and interests constitutes an integral aspect of political virtue and a crucial feature of political integrity. Thus, the 'static' flavour of the standard vogue of DH is partially maintained and reinforced by a picture of societal harmony which is, as I shall suggest, uncongenial to the societies we live in. It also misses much of the continuous sacrifices and dirt of everyday democratic politics. This point is glimpsed by Danielle Allen (2004) and Andy Sabl (2002). As they argue, the tendency of political philosophers to focus only on a single, grand and

dramatic moral sacrifice misconceives the practice of democratic politics and distorts our picture of what political life involves: it turns a blind eye to the recognition that politics requires on-going and “quotidian sacrifices” (Allen, 2004: 39) and “guarantees drama at the cost of perspective” (Sabl, 2002: 3).

Irrespective of whether standard DH theorists do account for compromise though, the affinities between compromise and the standard DH thesis, suggest that compromise might invite the same philosophical objections the DH problem so frequently does<sup>127</sup> (see chapter 3). As Gutmann and Thompson explain, “it is not simply that compromise will fall short”, in the sense that something valuable has been forfeited. It “will also include elements that are jointly incoherent and inconsistent with each other and with any single theory (2012: 193). Since in a compromise the parties “balance inconveniences”, to use Edmund Burke’s (1987: 126) words, a curious property of this phenomenon is that it will appear to be contradictory and vicious if viewed *only* from the perspective of a single tradition or theory of justice. Unlike consensus-based agreements, compromises contain a melange of principles and are not wholeheartedly endorsed<sup>128</sup>. Whilst the agreement is grudgingly accepted, “the disagreements among the parties are embodied in the compromise itself” (Gutmann & Thompson, 2012: 12) and few of its individual components are acceptable to *all* parties; only the entire package is.

This brings to the fore an additional feature of compromise which is associated with the conception of it as a process: mutual concessions (Day, 1989; 1991; Benditt, 1979). “To reach a compromise”, Bellamy explains, “all parties need to concede something; they need to adjust their claims and positions so as to facilitate accommodation” (2012: 286). Hence, a

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127 See for instance, George Santayana (1926).

128 Rawls’ consensus, Claudia Mills (2000) suggests, is akin to what Jean Hampton (1997) calls ‘endorsement consent’: it presupposes that an agreement is explicitly supported, not merely endorsed for pragmatic reasons (for the sake of getting something out of the dispute).

compromise requires each party to ‘hear the other side’ - even when the other side and its values appear to be despicable (see chapter 6). This requires negotiation, bargaining and a preparedness to sacrifice (some of) one’s interests and values. These rituals reinforce the perception of a compromise as a messy agreement. Needless to say, these are hardly necessary in a consensus: if a solution which is perfectly acceptable to both parties - one which is congruent with, and morally supported by, their tradition - does exist, there is *ipso facto* no need to engage in bargaining, negotiation or persuasion<sup>129</sup>. As Anthony Laden writes:

Negotiated agreements are compromises amongst parties who have different pre-existing interests ... They engage in bargaining as a means of maximizing the satisfaction of [their] interests, because they realize that the presence of other agents with different interests places an obstacle in their way. Deliberation, on the other hand ... is not a mutually acceptable compromise, but rather a shared solution ... It aims, to put this in Rawls’s terms, at an overlapping consensus and not merely a *modus vivendi* ... Deliberation reflects a kind of agreement among the parties to resolve their differences ... on mutually acceptable terms (2007: 280)

These rituals additionally mark a discrepancy between compromise and capitulation (van Parijs, 2012; Jones & O’ Flynn, 2012). I should emphasize here though that, whilst the proviso that ‘coercion is no compromise’ has become a *cliché* in the literature dealing with compromises, the distinction between coercion and compromise is not as clear-cut as assumed. For, “coercion and compromise can happen together” (Margalit, 2012: 52). This can be partly explained with reference to the fact that, in the absence of a consensus, the more competitive the game is and the more strategic solutions are sought; since ‘more for one means less for the other’ the extraction of concessions serves the maximization of gains

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129 A consensus, according to Rawls, is not reached via “rhetoric and persuasion” but “on the basis of mutually recognized criteria and evidence” (1996: 111).

(Bellamy et al, 2012). In addition to concealment and hypocrisy (see chapter 6), toughness has long been recognized as a virtue in negotiations (Meltsner & Schrag, 1973; Kornprobst, 2012). “Imbalances in threat-advantage, information and skill”, David Luban points out, “are systematically exploited” (1985: 405). These tactics, to borrow Charles Fried’s phrase, are “like moves in a game” and form an essential part of the practice of negotiations (1978: 72).

Whilst this is not to suggest that concessions in a compromise should not be, in some sense, mutual and voluntary, a rigid distinction between compromise and coercion would omit agreements that could count as compromises. It would also ignore certain processes and virtues necessary for the practice of negotiation and politics. Granted that coercion goes in degrees, “the closer an agreement is to a case of compromise, the further it is from coercion” and the furthest it is from cruelty (Margalit, 2012: 20- 21). Churchill’s remark on the Munich Agreement is suggestive here: “One pound was demanded at pistol’s point. When it was given, two pounds were demanded at pistol’s point” (Parliamentary Debates, 1938). The proverbial ‘pistol’s point’ entails more than coercion: it constitutes a clear reference to cruelty. In contrast to the typical “hardball” bargaining tactics, in such instances the opposing party is forced to unconditionally succumb to the other side.

So, extrapolated as a set of propositions, the distinct features of a compromise are the following: a) a compromise takes place in a context of deep and insurmountable interpersonal moral conflict and b) a compromise-based agreement reveals that a consensus on mutually shared interests, aspirations and conceptions of justice is, in some sense, impossible; c) compromise-based agreements are untidy: whilst compromise soothes conflict, the grounds of conflictuality and the conflict itself do not evaporate. In short, compromise-based agreements are not devoid of a moral remainder: each party in a compromise abandons some of its interests, aspirations and values; d) the moral remainder involved in compromises stems from each party’s engagement in a process of negotiation

and bargaining; e) these concessions are extracted voluntarily - or, at least, not entirely through coercion and cruelty.

To illustrate some of these features, we could consider the infamous 2010 Liberal Democrat - Conservative coalition. The coalition involved the formation of a joint programme, under which both parties would become partners in government. Each side jettisoned some of its policies in order to hold on to others; each party had to promote policies which were incongruent with their manifesto and pre-election promises and were thought to be wrong (McLean, 2012). The coalition, Richard Bellamy argues, “does not reflect a consensus because it involves all sides accepting a settlement that falls short of what they regard as right or good in ways that may feel misguided”. Both parties “chose to hold their noses and to do certain things they would rather not have done” (2012: 449). For instance, the Liberal Democrats abandoned their pledges on student fees whereas the Conservatives endorsed different immigration and inheritance tax policies than the ones proposed. Furthermore, “Liberal Democrats and Conservatives deeply disagreed about constitutional rights and the electoral system” and “had to reach a compromise on both in the Coalition Agreement” (Bellamy, 2012: 453). And, despite the fact that “the Coalition agreement begins by enunciating three shared principles - freedom, fairness and responsibility - the parties “diverge considerably in their interpretation of them” (Bellamy, 2012: 453). Had this agreement satisfied both parties’ first-options or stemmed from a shared conception of justice, we would not speak of a compromise.

Yet, it would seem that, it is because the Coalition agreement was a compromise that it was vilified by a considerable portion of the press. In what follows, I shall explore the negative perception of compromise in more detail. In so doing, I want to argue that attempts to deny the value of compromise in democratic politics are unsatisfactory: they misconstrue and idealize both what politics as a practice involves and the distinctive nature of political integrity. The argument I shall pursue here builds on two intertwined points I have advanced

in previous chapters. First, making sense of political ethics and DH entails acknowledging that there exists an irreducible clash between an admirable moral life and a virtuous political life. Second, the standards of evaluation of political excellence arise from within politics rather than from an external moral standpoint. The rupture between a moral and political life, then, is partially conditioned on the recognition that conflict is also manifested interpersonally: between different political agents or groups. Politicians are not self-sufficient: they operate in a domain of conflict and dependence which affects the virtues conducive to virtuous political practice and shapes the nature of political integrity. Simply put, I want to suggest that the practical and philosophical impossibility of an overlapping consensus in conditions of pluralism deems compromise an inescapable and valuable feature of democratic politics and a crucial aspect of political integrity.

### **7.3. Compromise and Democratic Politics**

Despite its apparent anachronism, Petrovici's remark in the 1930s that "compromise is perpetually condemned in theory and always used in practice" seems still to be relevant (1937: 736; quoted in Nachi, 2004: 293). As Jerry Goodstein adds, "there exists a history of antipathy to the topic of moral compromise" (2000: 808). No doubt, the reception of the 2010 Coalition did not escape this antipathy. The coalition, Bellamy observes, is thought "to be defective precisely because it entails compromises that are thought to be inherently unprincipled and undemocratic" (2012: 442). To be sure, this attitude can be partially explained with reference to the fact that the British public is not accustomed to coalitions: coalitions are, though not unknown, less common in Britain (at least in elections and whilst governing) as opposed to the US Congress, for instance, where they are the norm (McLean, 2012). However, it does not follow that in contexts where compromise is widely practiced it is viewed with less suspicion. For, similar cries of despair were also heard against the mismatch between Obama's pre-election promises and presidency: "it can't be a small thing, a typical thing, a trivial thing, to ask for belief and then betray it" Michael Gerson

notes (2012:1). Obama's compromises, Jeffrey Kuhner adds "violated his campaign pledges". He:

Has shown that he - and his presidency - are hollow and fake. He is posing as a genuine reformer but is ... a con man. Americans will soon realize this ... when they do, Obama's presidency will resemble his campaign rallies: Soaring rhetoric, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing (2008: 1).

This is also acknowledged by Gutmann and Thompson who write that:

In the 2008 campaign [Obama] promised to reject tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans. Now he was proposing to accept them. His Democratic critics cried betrayal. Stick to the principles you championed in the campaign. (2011: 1).

These remarks suggest that there exists an inextricable link between the seemingly distinct notions of compromise and the vice of betrayal. And whilst these critiques tend to obscure the political value of compromise, they are not unfounded *in toto*. Democratic politicians, Gutmann and Thompson suggest, "have a responsibility to their followers to increase the chances of achieving what they stand for" and materialize their pre-election promises (2012: 149). Yet, as indicated, compromise carries a moral remainder: a compromising disposition entails a willingness to abandon a portion of one's interests, aspirations or public proclamations and to endorse certain policies or actions favoured by one's political rivals. It is worth adding that politicians who compromise do not merely stand accused of betraying their tradition and the manifestos of their parties. Political compromises often entail the breaking of some electoral commitments - some of which were the reasons why the demos was inspired by, and voted for, the politicians in question in the first place. In other words, the relationship between compromise and betrayal bears an additional property in the context of democratic politics: the victim of this betrayal is also the electorate.

But to acknowledge that compromise involves a betrayal of some sort does not necessarily entail that compromise should not be practiced. Whilst the appearance of an uncompromising stance might serve politicians well during campaigns, it does not follow that an uncompromising disposition is a political virtue - especially whilst governing. It is not the case that compromise is unjust and undemocratic *tout court* and it does not follow that virtuosos of political compromise are characterized by a profound lack of integrity as some of its critics argue<sup>130</sup> (c.f. Meehan, 1984; Rand, 1996; Mencken, 1946; Downs, 1957; Reno, 1972; Aspinall, 2005). To suggest otherwise, would be to reinstate a vision I have arduously resisted and which I shall further challenge here: the Platonic Ideal or the doctrine of final rational harmony - the claim that conflicts, either in individual political ethics (between the standards of excellence that apply to an admirable moral life and those that apply to a virtuous life of politics) and in societal ethics (between the aspirations and interests of different agents or groups) are irrational and ultimately surmountable. In this sense, to view politicians who compromise as having no integrity *at all* would be to mistakenly conceive political integrity as akin to moral integrity- or, what Martin Hollis (1982) and Sue Mendus (2009a) aptly term, the integrity and consistency of the saint. To use Bernard Williams' (2002a: 2) words, this would erroneously "make the moral prior to the political": it would misrepresent the messy context in which politicians operate as well as the nature of political practice and integrity. And these very problems also permeate Rawls' political thought - his hopeful belief in the possibility of an overlapping consensus. Or, so I shall argue.

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130 The tendency to conflate political and moral integrity is exhibited by a considerable portion of philosophers. See Halfon, (1990), Rand (1996), Broad, (1952), Santayana (1926), Blustein (1991) and McFall (1987).

### 7.3. 1. *Democratic Politics and the Possibility of an Overlapping Consensus*

Rawls' political thought, I have noted, severely curtails the space for compromise in public life. This is acknowledged by John Gray (2000) who suggests that within Rawls' theory the need for compromise is eliminated. Even more forceful is Claudia Mills' remark that: "it is odd that throughout Political Liberalism 'compromise' is treated as a dirty word, as though the last thing we would ever want is (curled lip, sneering tone) a compromise" (2000: 196). That Rawls' theory makes little room for compromise is hardly surprising. As Gutmann and Thompson remind us, "you will reject nearly every compromise if you try to anticipate the outcome by testing it against a coherent theory of justice. By its nature, a compromise will almost never satisfy such a theory" (2012: 37). In this sense, the political liberal's perception of compromise is, perhaps, not that different from the contemporary vilifications of Obama's and Clegg's compromises. The fact that compromise is not grounded on a substantive set of common values and interests renders it morally *and* politically unjust. This perception of compromise, Richard Bellamy and Martin Hollis tell us, is not uncommon within the ranks of political liberalism: most political liberals conceive compromise as an unacceptable "sacrifice of principle to expediency" (2007: 54- 55). What seems to emerge from the political liberal's rejection of compromise then, is this: in ordinary democratic politics, political integrity is not incongruent with moral integrity.

This insight emerges more clearly from a point I highlighted in the previous section: Rawls' insistence that conflict can and should be soluble without remainder via an overlapping consensus. An overlapping consensus, according to Rawls, aspires "to make it possible for all to accept the political conception as true ... from the standpoint of their own comprehensive view" (2005: 13). What is worth reiterating here is that an overlapping consensus presupposes that the substantial terms and content of the agreement are explicitly supported, not merely endorsed for pragmatic reasons. In connection to this, Rawls suggests that in instances where "the (liberal) principles of justice" and those stemming from one's

comprehensive doctrine or tradition conflict, reasonable public individuals “might well adjust or revise [the latter] rather than reject those principles” (1996: 160). In short, political liberals do not merely seek to sanitize public life by rejecting compromise as totally unacceptable. They also reject compromise on the basis that it is not strictly necessary. For, if an overlapping consensus is possible - if it is possible for all the parties involved to agree on a substantive set of values and endorse these as true from the standpoint of their comprehensive views or traditions - then a more optimal and integrity-preserving agreement is not unfeasible. This is noted by Gutmann and Thompson when they suggest that “common ground agreements”, which “resemble what philosophers call an overlapping consensus”, are “morally and politically attractive because they have a principled coherence, judged from all sides” (2012: 38). Again, the point here is that an overlapping consensus does not just eliminate interpersonal or societal conflict about justice. It also eliminates conflict in individual political ethics - between morality and politics: in Rawls’ account, moral and political integrity are neither necessarily incompatible nor that different. Differently put, Rawls’ ideal theory - by virtue of its emphasis on the possibility of an overlapping consensus - does not just propound a tidy and perfect agreement (or society). It also feeds into a conception of the perfect individual life.

Needless to say, some of the above examples of compromises as well as mere reflection on historical experience already suggest that an overlapping consensus is practically difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. We should thus not expect a consensus to always obtain in practice; it is unlikely that most political agreements are underpinned by a substantive set of common values or principles of justice, whatever these may be. Disagreements about justice seem as pervasive as disagreements about the good. Hence, the disparity between morality and politics does not evaporate: compromise is often the only way to reach an agreement in conditions of conflict. A version of this argument is put forward by Gutmann and Thompson who argue that:

Few doubt that consensus is desirable ... and most agree that it is usually preferable to the standard form of compromise, which leaves all parties dissatisfied. But the common ground is more barren ... than the inspiring rhetoric in its favour might suggest .... Consensual agreements are not impossible, but they are rare and, in polarized politics only getting rarer ... It is the classic compromises that offer the best hope (2012: 13 - 39).

This is an important indication of the necessity of compromise in politics. It also constitutes the commonest argument advanced in its favour (c.f. Philp, 2001; Margalit, 2012). However, it is not *in itself* a definitive objection to the political liberal's stance. For the political liberal's response is that failure to obtain a consensus-based agreement is a mark of unreasonableness; so, too, are disagreements about justice. A failure to reach an agreement on substantive and common principles of justice is a sign of defect: it signals that something has gone "wrong" (Rawls, 1996: 55). For, our irrationality and practical incapacity to achieve this aside, the burdens of judgement are not sufficiently burdensome to preclude this agreement. Public officials may be too feeble-witted, vicious or irrational to reach agreement, but agreement is nevertheless philosophically conceivable. At least in theory, a perfect solution *even* in conditions of pluralism and conflict (and *even* if one accounts for the burdens of judgement) *always* exists. In other words, Clegg's or Obama's compromises do not constitute sufficient evidence for mounting a defence of compromise in politics. That these politicians betrayed their pre-election pledges constitutes an unfortunate indication that they (and those with whom they compromised) are unreasonable. For, a more optimal and integrity-preserving agreement always existed. Hence, whilst a compromising disposition is required in practice, it is neither inescapable nor necessary *per se*. It is, in fact, plausible to sanitize public life from compromise and betrayal and harmonize moral and political integrity: all it takes is good public reasoning which would aid practitioners of politics from different traditions to converge on certain common substantive values. By implication, the task of political philosophy is not to contemplate compromises; it should

help us achieve what is, albeit practically difficult, not philosophically inconceivable: perfection in societal *and* individual ethics under the aegis of “social concord” and reason (Rawls, 2005: 148). Or, so it is claimed.

What lurks in the background of the political liberals’ rejection of compromise is a version of the utopian vision which we have previously encountered in the works of Plato, the Utilitarians and Kantians and which is integral to the view of innocence: value monism. “This monistic model”, Claude Galipeau observes, “runs throughout the ethical tradition from Plato, to Aristotle, to Hegel and Marx and from Kant to Rawls” (1994: 67). Now, one could retort here that to lump the Rawlsian liberal vision in this category would be a mistake. For Rawls’ account is not monistic. It does, as I have mentioned, *prima facie* accommodate pluralism and conflict. Nor is it utopian *in toto*. Rawls is clear that his political philosophy is realistically utopian: it probes the limits of practical political possibility. Indeed, one might go as far as to claim that Rawls’ account in *Political Liberalism* sits well with the dynamic account of DH in at least two respects: i) the aspiration of Rawls’s theory to be ‘political’ dovetails with my suggestion that an adequate account of political ethics should draw on the resources of politics itself; and ii) since a consensus constitutes an interpersonal agreement in the face of *prima facie* disagreement, moral conflict and pluralism, Rawls does take the permanence of these features seriously.

But variants of these claims are also advanced by the standard DH thesis. Yet, whilst standard DH theorists do allude to pluralism and conflict they fail to adequately capture these. As I have demonstrated in chapter 4, the standard DH thesis is hardly distinguishable from the monistic vision it seeks to reject: the Platonic Ideal or the doctrine of final rational harmony. And, it is precisely for this reason that the orthodox way of thinking about the DH problem fails to live up to its purported capacity to capture the complexity of political ethics. This insight, I contend, also extends to Rawls’ political thought. For it is not just that an overlapping consensus is practically difficult to achieve but

nonetheless philosophically plausible. Rather, an overlapping consensus is practically and philosophically implausible. The upshot of this is that the hopeful belief in the possibility of an overlapping consensus ends up displacing the realities of politics. It fails to capture the messy context in which politicians operate and does not live up to its purported capacity to capture the limits of what is politically possible. In so doing, it also mischaracterizes the nature of political integrity.

To illustrate this point, I want to begin by highlighting more clearly certain parallels between the political thought of the Rawlsian liberal and the standard DH thesis. For instance, just as the DH thesis puts the moral prior to the political and ignores the political necessity of hypocrisy, so too does Rawls: he rejects compromise for moral reasons. This point also emerges from Bellamy and Hollis' (2007) abovementioned remark but is more explicitly advanced by Bernard Williams (2002a) and William Galston (2010) who suggest that Rawls' account echoes Kant's insistence that:

Though politics by itself is a difficult art, its union with morality is no art at all ... One cannot compromise here and seek the middle course of a pragmatic conditional law between the morally right and the expedient. All politics must bend its knee before the right (1903: 183).

And just as the standard DH thesis attempts to resolve the conflict between morality and politics by appealing to certain cathartic rituals which are thought to be compatible with both ways of life, so too does the Rawlsian liberal: he presupposes a substantive super-value which is universally accepted by all reasonable individuals and resolves both societal conflict *and* the conflict between moral and political integrity. As Stuart Hampshire remarks:

This picture of a possible harmony under the governance of reason is carried through the Christian centuries and persists in the philosophy of the Enlightenment, and it persists in contemporary liberalism ...

Whatever the contingent differences between us arising from our personal history the king in his castle and the peasant in his hovel are one, in their common humanity, in virtue of the overriding superiority of rational moral principles that king and peasant both implicitly recognize (2000: 157).

Hence, both liberal moralists and standard DH theorists share this much: messiness, conflict and imperfection are apparent, even possible to an extent. But they are not necessarily insurmountable; the fact of pluralism aside, a tidy and rational solution to moral conflicts should exist: some overarching principles which perfectly resolve moral conflicts should exist. To put it simply, both approaches follow a large amount of philosophers since Plato and take conflict to be a sign of pathology - a disease that can and should be overcome.

What follows from this, is that just as the standard DH thesis - by virtue of its idealism and incapacity to take pluralism and conflict seriously - is bound to fail to capture the complex realities of politics so too is Rawls's ideal theory. This point is explicitly accepted by a considerable portion of political realists who, in a Machiavellian fashion, have grown exasperated with the moralism of contemporary political philosophy (see chapter 1). Appeals to the possibility of an overlapping consensus, political realists suggest, mischaracterize the messy context in which politicians operate and displace what is distinctive of politics as a practice. "To realist critics", Horton explains, Rawls' theory is "more likely to appear plain, unqualified utopianism, well beyond anything that is a practicable political possibility" (2010: 436). This is not merely because "one could read the entire corpus of Rawls' work without ever having much sense of the seminal role of political parties", nor because "elections figure little more than the right to vote". Rather, liberal moralists mischaracterize politics in more fundamental ways: for them, the realities of politics are a source of embarrassment: "there is no real recognition within liberal moralism that the winning and maintaining political power is a crucial and unavoidable part of the context in which it is exercised" (Horton, 2010: 434). The liberal and post-

Enlightenment representation of the political sidelines the fact that people are embedded in relationships of power, competition and interdependence. As a consequence, the Rawlsian conception of politics appears to be “etiolated, antiseptic and impossibly high-minded” (Horton, 2010: 433). Put bluntly, Rawls resembles what Bernard Crick terms as the “a-political liberal”: the liberal who “expects too much” and “wishes to enjoy all the fruits of politics without paying the price” (2005: 97). His deeply hopeful belief in the possibility of harmony under the governance of reason ignores the circumstances which, as I have noted in chapter 5, make politics necessary in the first place. What emerges from Rawls’ account, then, is an abhorrence and displacement of politics. To use Crick’s words, the a-political liberal likes “to scrub (politics) down, clean it up, and tether it firmly until this terrier becomes a fairly lifeless, lap-dog” (Crick, 2005: 123).

To be clear, the point here is not just that the hopeful belief in the possibility of consensus does not sit well with real political practice. Rather, the conviction that it is possible to discover certain common and substantive principles of justice which would achieve harmony amongst seemingly incompatible interests and values is philosophically unfounded. What is particularly problematic with Rawls’ account is that, Rawls erroneously claims universal rational authority for certain substantive principles when they rest on the tradition of liberalism itself, which is just one tradition amongst the many. In Hampshire’s words, Rawls “leaves space for the plurality” of traditions “to be found in any society, but only if they can be called reasonable, and this means reasonable as judged by the traditional standards of liberalism itself” (1993: 44). A more general way of putting it is this: given Rawls’ recognition that a plurality of incommensurable conceptions of the good exist, “why should an overlapping consensus among reasonable persons about basic liberal values or principles be either required or expected?” (Hampshire, 2000: 45- 46). In short, if such traditions are incommensurable, why then should a set of common and substantive principles of justice -which is congruent with each tradition - be possible even in theory?

At this point my earlier appeal to history takes on renewed force: *pace* the heirs of Plato and the Enlightenment project, there is nowhere evidence that the tendency of reason is to converge on a fixed set of substantive principles (whatever these may be). As Christian Arnsperger and Henry Picavet emphasize:

While the fact that social antagonisms may be forever unbreachable has been a constant object of deep preoccupation for all of post-Machiavellian political philosophy, endeavours in the Rawlsian vein to create the social and cognitive conditions for an “overlapping consensus” between irreducibly antagonistic comprehensive conceptions of the good ... appear to neglect some deep implications of irreducibility itself (2004: 176).

If one takes pluralism, irreducibility and conflict seriously, there is no reason to assume that these should not hold for justice as well. John Gray drives this point home forcefully: “certainly, value-pluralism is not restricted to conceptions of the good. It goes all the way down, right down into principles of justice” (1995: 149). A quick reading of history, Hampshire tells us, would suggest that “all determination is negation” (*omnis determinatio est negatio*) (2000: 34). In seeking to distinguish themselves from others in terms of their traditions, groups have tended to define themselves - their conception of the good and justice - in oppositional terms: not just in terms of *who they are* and *what they espouse* but, more importantly, in terms of *who they are not* and *what they reject*. A liberal may thus “rightfully criticize the distribution of wealth and of income in America or Britain today as grossly and substantially unjust”. This “is done in the light of a particular conception of distributive justice, which is part of a whole moral outlook and a particular conception of the good” (Hampshire, 2000: 160). But “we will expect opposition from conservatives who have another conception of justice that they can defend and that is part of their conception of good, stressing property rights and the autonomy of individuals” (Hampshire, 2000: 160). This, as I have indicated, was also the case in the 2010 Coalition: whilst both parties

appealed to fairness, each party conceptualized this notion in different and incompatible ways.

As long as practitioners of politics are affiliated with diverse and conflicting traditions, and have different life stories, neither conflict nor political enmities - either within a community or between different communities - can ever be expected to cease (Hampshire, 2000; Shklar, 1989). By virtue of its failure to take pluralism, conflict and irreducibility in societal ethics seriously, Rawls' account idealizes the context in which politicians operate. It unsatisfactorily stretches the limits of what is politically possible and, as such, it mischaracterizes the nature of political integrity. Put bluntly, in Rawls' account the very possibility of harmony between moral and political integrity rests on an *a priori* assumption of societal harmony which is, at best, a moralistic and innocent fairytale.

#### **7.4. Compromise and Political Integrity**

I have been arguing that the philosophical endeavour to sanitize politics from compromise is unsatisfactory. The attempt rests on an unwarranted obsession with harmony which ends up misrepresenting societal *and* individual political life. The belief in the possibility of an overlapping political consensus idealizes the context in which politicians operate and what is politically possible even in the most ideal circumstances. It also misconstrues what is distinctive of politics and political integrity. In this section, I want to push this point and its implications further. I want to suggest that if societal harmony is impossible, both in theory as well as in practice, compromise is inevitably bound to be a necessary part of political virtue and an integral aspect of political integrity.

The necessity of political compromise is premised on a point I have advanced in previous chapters: that if we want to make sense of political ethics and DH, we should take the context in which politicians operate seriously. For, the standards of political excellence

arise from *within* politics as opposed to any external abstract moral standpoint. To be more specific, an integral aspect of political virtue is the capacity to satisfy some of the ends of politics in a Heraclitian domain characterized by perpetual conflict and a complex web of interdependencies without (re)producing a ‘war of all against all’. Interdependence and conflict, I have suggested following Machiavelli, inevitably entails that one cannot pursue a virtuous political life by merely relying “on one’s own arms”. “Good friends” are also necessary (*Prince*: 96). In short, political virtue entails a capacity to recognize and exploit these ineliminable features of politics. To put it differently, one cannot remain alive to the perpetual conflict between a moral and political life (which, as I suggested in previous chapters, is an integral part of political experience) if one disregards some of the ways in which this very conflict is manifested. Leading a virtuous political life is impossible if one is vested with the innocent belief that societal conflict and competition for power are not perpetual features of politics. “Political prudence”, Hampshire remarks, “expects a perpetual contest between hostile conceptions of justice” (1991: 1). By implication, political prudence also entails a capacity to realize what is politically possible under the circumstances and to dexterously manage conflict by building and sustaining mutually useful political relationships. Satisfying the ends of politics often requires cooperating with one’s political enemies - with public agents who are not affiliated with one’s tradition or party and do not share one’s interests and aspirations. Given that the mutual antipathies amongst political rivals are ineliminable as well as the fact that in contemporary societies an overlapping political consensus is impossible this cooperation cannot be forthcoming; forming political relationships is often impossible if each political party or tradition is unwilling to negotiate and trim some of its principles and interests.

This insight is also glimpsed by Bellamy et al who tell us that “there are always limits to what individual decision-makers can do on their own, and to what extent they can make others follow them”. And it is “these limits [that] make compromises necessary” (2012: 275). Herein emerges the paradox of compromise then: whilst commitment to a set

of principles and interests inextricably entails a commitment to seeing them realized, in politics it also means partially abandoning and betraying them (Luban, 1985). This need not suggest that compromise is strictly inescapable *per se* - that is, inescapable in the sense that one has no other alternatives to pursue. Besides, as I have noted, it is difficult to speak of a compromise if a party is left with no other alternatives *at all*. What this does suggest though, is that an uncompromising disposition, whilst admirable with respect to a moral or purely private life, is not a political virtue. As Hampshire reminds us:

Machiavelli is particularly vivid in his descriptions of reversals of fortune which demand powers of bold improvisation and of sudden and decisive changes of plan. A successful politician is always rather loose in his think, flexible, not bound by principles or by theories, not bound by his own intentions (1989: 163).

Those who find compromise and betrayal intolerable are characterized by a dogmatic inflexibility which closely resembles innocence and the integrity of the saint. Saints, Bellamy remarks, are determined to keep their position or realize their vision come what may: they “concede nothing either to those who hold different views to theirs or to the failure of the world to measure up to their expectations of it” (2010: 417). An uncompromising disposition is characterized by an obsession with purity, an attempt to eradicate conflict and any sort of dependence or intermingling with others which pollutes that which must be kept pure. “Shit”, Margalit tells us, “is the negation of the pure”. To seek to extirpate oneself from compromise and betrayal is to “crave life without shit” (2012: 157). The problem, however, is that dependence and conflict are part and parcel of the shitty world of ordinary politics. So, too, are compromise and betrayal.

This recognition sits well with a point which I have advanced in previous chapters and which lies at the core of the dynamic account of DH: consistent moralists or innocent individuals who are unaware of the realities of politics and choose to stick rigidly to certain

clear-cut moral dictates are not suited for public life. At its worst, an uncompromising disposition might easily spill into a violent will to publically impose one's principles through abstract cruelty. As Bellamy puts it "salvation, be it in the hereafter or in their own estimate of themselves", might tempt uncompromising individuals "to clean up us and the rest of the world whatever the dirtiness of the cost ... Heaven is purchased at a terrifying price - of creating a hell on earth to save us all" (2010: 417). This is the lesson Jean Paul Sartre's *Les Mains Sales* forces upon us. As have I suggested in chapter 4, whilst this is the play from which the standard DH thesis takes its name, Sartre's insights on politics (like Machiavelli's) are only superficially acknowledged by standard DH theorists: Hoerderer's character and his insights on political practice share little with the current vogue of DH. To say that Hoerderer merely attempts to convince Hugo to lose his innocence - conceived as the absence of wrongdoing - would be misleading. For, Hugo is not unwilling to get his hands bloody in order to advance the revolutionary party's vision. His remark that "I'm not afraid of blood" foreshadows Hoerderer's sarcastic answer: "Really! Red gloves, that's elegant. It's the rest that scares you. That's what stinks to your little aristocratic nose" (1989: 218 - 219). The 'rest' should be highlighted here: Hoerderer alludes to an insight which forms the essence of Sartre's play and which lies at the core of our ordinary politics but is, nonetheless, ignored by Hugo and those who attempt to evade it: the necessity of compromise and the centrality of this notion to political integrity.

If the revolutionary party is to rise to power, Hoerderer explains, a compromise is a lesser evil: "You ought to know that we can't get power through an armed struggle ... Who will support us?" (1989: 214 - 215). As an experienced politician, Hoerderer is aware of the muddle and realities of politics: rising to power through "one's own arms" is impossible; political success requires cooperating with others who share neither the party's vision nor its aspirations. If the party is to fulfil some of its goals a coalition with its political rivals is

necessary: “we can take power with Ka-rsky’s liberals and the Regent’s conservatives” says Hoerderer. It is this phenomenon which the innocent Hugo finds impossible to contemplate:

Hoerderer: A class traitor! No less? ... Why am I a class traitor?

Hugo: You have no right to involve the party in your schemes ... The party has one program: the realization of a socialist economy, and one method of achieving it: class struggle. You are going to use it to pursue a policy of class collaboration ... We'll go from compromise to compromise ... We shall be contaminated, weakened, disoriented ... in the end the bourgeois parties won't even have to go to the trouble of liquidating us (1989: 214 - 215).

Hugo evokes the familiar charges often raised against compromise: to compromise is to betray one’s integrity and alienate the party’s aspirations; it is to legitimize the enemy the party is supposed to be fighting against; it is to eschew justice. Hugo’s innocence however renders him severely impaired. The realities and demands of politics evade him: he discards Hoerderer’s remark that the party is dependent upon others with different aspirations and that its goal is to exert political power. “Why take it? ... You should not take power at such a price” he tells him (Sartre, 1989: 216 -217). At the core of his innocence lies an aspiration which I have alluded to in the previous chapter: a vision of a perfect and pure society, where “our ideas, *all* our ideas and *only* these victorious” (1989: 217). As the heirs of Machiavelli have long recognized, it is those innocent individuals who are eager to eliminate conflict once and for all and fail to recognize their dependency on others that are prone to jeopardize the precarious stability of the public realm and are unsuited for a life of politics: “You, I know you know, you are a destroyer” Hoerderer tells Hugo; “Your purity resembles death. The revolution you dream is not ours. You don’t want to change the world; you want to blow it up” (1989: 220).

At this point, it is appropriate to emphasize two issues. First, whilst compromise is, in general, a ‘lesser evil’ *vis-à-vis* cruelty I do not wish to argue that cruelty is entirely

unnecessary in politics. Second, it does not follow, as Margalit argues, that compromises “that perpetuate cruelty” should never be struck (2012: 2). To suggest otherwise would not just push us back to an undesirable moralism I have rejected. It would also ignore a crucial Machiavellian point I have alluded to in chapter 6: whilst Machiavelli sought to economize cruelty, the prospect and necessity of this vice cannot be eliminated altogether from politics. As Horton puts it, public agents who refuse to compromise and pose a threat to political stability “still have to be dealt with one way or another” (2009: 10). In addition, when the survival of the political community is threatened it may be necessary to forge political relationships with regimes that promote cruelty.

This is neatly captured by an example from WWII, which is also used by Margalit (2012) and which contradicts his basic principle: on June 1941, Churchill stated that Hitler’s plan to attack Russia relied on right-wing sympathies in Britain not to interfere. But Hitler’s expectations, he added, were wrong: Britain would aid Russia. His remark invited an expression of dissent from his secretary: “how could Churchill, the arch anti-communist support Russia? Does not this support amount to bowing down in the House of Rimmon?” (Churchill, 1986: 332) Churchill’s secretary alludes to the typical charges raised against compromise: a deal with Stalin would render Churchill inconsistent; it would be a pact with injustice and a betrayal of one’s principles. Churchill was quick to acknowledge this: “No one has been a more consistent opponent of Communism than I have for the last twenty years. I will unsay no word that I have spoken about it”. “The Nazi regime” he continued “is indistinguishable from the worst features of Communism. It is devoid of all theme and principle ... It excels all forms of human wickedness in the efficiency of its cruelty” (1986: 332). Yet, “all this fades away before the spectacle which is now unfolding” (1986: 332). Churchill alludes to a point which I have touched on in chapter 6: in contrast to Stalin, Hitler’s cruelty was much more open. At least, Margalit tells us, Stalin was a hypocrite in his foreign policy: “the cliché that hypocrisy is the homage paid by vice to virtue has a

profound meaning”. For, “hypocrisy, as irritating as it is, recognizes morality” and entails a willingness to, at least, sit down at the table, negotiate and compromise (2012: 196). Hitler’s foreign policy on the other hand left nothing disguised - it sought to eradicate morality, conflict and politics altogether. More importantly, it posed an imminent threat to the community Churchill was responsible for. Despite his commitment against communism, which he regarded as a despicable enemy - because of its cruelty - Churchill realized that he was confronted with an even larger cruelty: to defeat evil a pact with evil was necessary.

To be clear, I do not wish to suggest that there are (or should be) no limits as to when politicians should compromise. Rather, my point here is that it is impossible to determine *a priori* what these limits should be. “There is”, to use Hampshire’s words, “no completeness or perfection to be found in [political] morality” (1989: 177). Political virtue, as Machiavelli recognizes, should be sensitive to the specifics of each circumstance. To reject a compromise with Stalin based on a supposedly absolute principle whilst one’s community is on the verge of destruction would not be just politically irresponsible. It would be immoral. A refusal to compromise *in abstracto* of the concrete and particular circumstances of politics is bound to be uncongenial to the realities of this domain and the inevitable conflicts this way of life involves<sup>131</sup>. It is also bound to jeopardize some of the ends those who lead a political life are supposed to serve.

This recognition need not emerge only from such drastic cases. It can be also illustrated by considering our seemingly more mundane and everyday democratic politics where an uncompromising disposition typically entails an unwillingness to sit down at the negotiation table. Whilst this may not jeopardize the stability of the community, one has reasons to wonder whether such a disposition is politically virtuous. Since ordinary democratic politics is characterized by a plurality of traditions and represents conflicting and incommensurable points of view, neither the partial satisfaction of one’s pre-election

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<sup>131</sup> A similar point is raised by Williams (2002a).

promises and commitments nor change can occur without compromises. A dogmatic refusal to cooperate with one's political rivals and compromise whilst discussing policy formation would practically mean to entirely abandon the hope of seeing one's principles realized. This follows from the paradox of compromise I highlighted above. To refuse to partially betray one's principles and pre-election promises would, paradoxically mean betraying them *in toto*. As Donald Boudreaux and Dwight Lee remark, "uncompromising politicians" are hardly, if ever, successful in politics. One of the obvious reasons for this is that they "game too little pork to send home to voters" (1997: 365). A refusal to compromise would also mean to abandon the hope of altering the *status quo* - even if this alteration is incremental. As Gutmann and Thompson put it, "if parties to a compromise become obsessed with finding common ground or consensus solutions, they are likely to miss the chance of any compromise" (2012: 207). And, without compromise "on health and taxation or other major issues, the status quo prevails, even if it preserves a policy that serves everyone's interests poorly and even if it leads to major crisis" (2012: 30). The example I utilized in chapter 6 - Obama's pre-election commitment to public healthcare - is suggestive here. Had Obama refused to compromise with the Republicans on public healthcare he would have entirely abandoned any possibility he had for effecting positive change to a problematic healthcare system.

But, it is not just that a refusal to compromise would lead to the complete abandonment of one's principles or public pledges in contemporary politics. There is more to be said here. For, in certain circumstances, an uncompromising disposition would inescapably lead to the betrayal of one of the ends of politics: rising to power or staying in office. This point is neatly captured in McLean's (2012) and Bellamy's (2012) analysis of the 2010 Coalition in the UK. The option to refuse to compromise was open to both parties: the two largest parties - the Conservatives or, less plausibly, Labour - could form a minority government with sufficient passive support from other parties to get their budget approved. On the one hand, this would have left the Liberal Democrats out of office. On the other

hand, the party which would form a minority government would have been severely handicapped. Minority governments have historically proven to be unstable, short-lived and unsuccessful - even more so, one could suggest, amidst economic crises and political upheavals (McLean, 2012). Either way, each party's rigid adherence to its principles and pre-election commitments would have resulted in a failure to achieve (some of) the ends of politics.

So far I have sought to suggest that, since politicians operate in conditions of interdependence and conflict, a compromising disposition is bound to be a necessary part of ordinary politics and political integrity. Political integrity is not akin to the integrity and consistency of the saint. The argument I have advanced thus far echoes Nancy Rosenblum's suggestion that "a disposition to compromise" constitutes an essential quality that partisans must cultivate and possess if partisanship is to serve democratic politics well. This recognition, she maintains, rejects "uncompromising extremism" because it lacks a "commitment to getting the public business done" and represents "an abdication of the responsibility for governing" (2008: 361- 362; 402). In a similar vein, Martin Benjamin suggests that "one who cannot abide the glad handling and the various compromises" often "required to get elected" or "who takes no enjoyment from the rough and tumble of political bargaining and negotiation is cut out for the life of democratic politics" (1990: 178). However, to acknowledge that "good politicians", to use Donald Wittman's words, "create coalitions and find ... compromises" is not the end of the story (1995: 154). There is more to be said here. For, it is worth remembering that politics is an on-going practice; and, especially in the context of contemporary democratic societies, politicians are not only dependent on their political rivals; they are also dependent on the electorate. As suggested in chapter 6, politicians professing no high-minded principles and unreservedly admitting that their highest skill is to compromise and partially betray their principles and commitments neither inspire the electorate nor do they have long-lived political careers. In other words, whilst the satisfaction of some of the ends of politics becomes impossible without

compromise, these very ends run the danger of being jeopardized if politicians are not careful with the way they publically present their compromises.

This point is nicely captured in Boehner's interview with Lesley Stahl on CBS's *60 Minutes*, before he became Speaker of the House after the Republican success in the 2010 congressional elections:

Boehner: We have to govern. That's what we were elected to do.

Stahl: But governing means compromising.

Boehner: It means working together.

Stahl: It also means compromising ...

Boehner: I am not going to compromise on my principles, nor am I going to compromise the will of the American people...When you say the word compromise a lot of Americans look up and go, 'Uh-oh, they are going to sell me out'.

Stahl: But you did compromise ... to get the Bush tax cuts made permanent?

Boehner: We found a common ground.

Stahl: Why won't you say - you are afraid of the word.

Boehner: I reject the word (CBS, 2010).

This interview brings to the fore an insight I defended in previous chapters and which lies at the core of the dynamic account of DH: the necessity of hypocrisy - the recognition that this vice constitutes the glue that holds together a virtuous political life. Whilst compromises are necessary in politics, politicians are often required to hypocritically reject its practice and disassociate themselves from it. Given that politics involves a continuous struggle for power, successful politicians must not be seen as too willing to compromise; political success often requires glossing one's compromises by diverting the public's attention away from the moral remainder (or the betrayal) inherent in them. In other words, politicians are often required to pretend that they have achieved a fictional consensus which fully preserves

the interests of their constituents and their public proclamations. As Donald Boudreaux and Dwight Lee argue:

Successful politicians are those who understand how [politics] is played and are willing to play it skilfully. These politicians somehow succeed in portraying their compromises as being fully consistent with principled commitments to voters' visions. Platitudes and political obfuscation [enable] skilful politicians continually to strike interest-group deals (1997: 373).

As president, George Bush learned this lesson the hard way from his autumn 1990 compromise with congressional Democrats which violated his "read my lips, no new taxes" campaign pledge (Bush, 2011: 5 - 15). To be sure, Bush's campaign pledge served a politically legitimate strategic imperative: mobilize the base. It was a factor in Bush's victory, clearly differentiating him from his Democratic rival. Once elected however, Bush could make no headway with a Congress controlled by Democrats. Rather than let the budget expand even further, Bush agreed to raise several taxes. The problem though, was that Bush 'got caught in the act' and failed to deflect the voters' attention from his compromises. Bush displayed a naïveté and innocence which brings to mind Walzer's (1973) moral politician: he paid little attention to the strategic aspect of his statements and the necessity to conceal his dirt or the moral remainder inherent in his acts. Consequently, his rivals found it easy to portray him as purely unprincipled, hypocritical and self-interested (Boudreaux & Lee, 1997; Gutmann & Thompson, 2012). Contrast Bush to his immediate predecessor, Ronald Reagan. Even though Reagan compromised his pre-election commitments during his presidency, his communication skills and rhetorical dexterity were well-enough refined to deflect voters' attention from his compromises and focus instead on his proudly proclaimed ideological beliefs and high-minded ideals <sup>132</sup> (Bovard, 1991).

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132 For example, Reagan dropped his pledge to eliminate the Departments of Energy and Education and agreed to several tax hikes (Weidenbaum, 1988; Stockman, 1986; Gutmann

Despite his compromises, Reagan was perceived as one of the most ideologically committed presidents of modern times, and it was his pretentious staunch ideological commitment that seems to have appealed most powerfully to voters.

### **7.5. Conclusion**

My aim throughout this chapter was to build on my defence of hypocrisy and dynamic DH in contemporary politics. I sought to suggest that if want to make sense of political integrity we should accept that an overlapping consensus in conditions of pluralism is philosophically and practically unfeasible; that compromise is a necessary feature of political life and an essential aspect of political integrity. An innocent and dogmatic pursuit of one's commitments in politics might well promote abstract cruelty - and thereby jeopardize order and stability - or lead to defeat: a rigid refusal to compromise one's commitments would mean the entire abandonment of any hope of seeing them realized. Political integrity, as I have repeated, is not akin to the integrity and consistency of a saint. Rather, it involves the recognition that in politics one's choices are, in most circumstances, bound to be the lesser of two evils and one's dependency on others is such that one cannot ever be free from seeking an uneasy conciliation of competing and incombable claims. In other words, the integrity of those engaged in politics is intertwined with a capacity 'to keep dancing' in conditions of perpetual conflict and ubiquitous dependence. At the core of political integrity lies, at best, an enduring soil and sweat on one's hands and soul - the product of the hypocrisy, dissimulation and the various handshakes and compromises politics requires. At worst, one's hands are bound to be bloody - especially when the precarious order and stability of the public realm is jeopardized and when the above avenues

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& Thompson, 2012). James Bovard mentions a telling example of Reagan's rhetorical dexterity. In 1984 Reagan ordered the raise of trade barriers. But, in announcing this protectionist order, Reagan began with a paean to free trade. Bovard (1991: 79 - 81) called Reagan's speech "a masterpiece in trade doubletalk".

for solving the conflict more civilly and less viciously fail. The integrity of the politician is, to invoke Hollis' words, "the integrity of the trimmer" (1982: 397). Viewed starkly from the perspective of a theory of justice or moral integrity, political integrity will, almost certainly, appear to amount to no integrity at all. This conviction sits neatly with the accounts propounded by the heirs of Plato but is nonetheless misplaced: it turns a blind eye to the distinctiveness of political life and to the very ends, virtues and characteristics which render this way life distinct.

## 8. Political Morality, the Problem of DH and Crisis: A Retrospect

*I recall a remark made to me by Stefan Korner, which I found a compliment, after a paper on moral conflict: “You said it’s all a mess, and it is all a mess”.*

B. Williams<sup>133</sup>

### 8.1. Introduction

The aim of this concluding chapter is to rehearse the argument I sought to advance throughout the thesis. In particular, I wish to bring together the most crucial aspects of the dynamic account of DH and outline *why* such an account matters - not just by virtue of its capacity to make us rethink *what it really means to have DH in politics* but also in terms of its capacity to make us reconsider *what it means to lead a virtuous political life in the context of contemporary, liberal democratic societies*. Put another way, by bringing together the core insights of the dynamic account of DH, I want to delineate not only how it contributes to the literature on DH but also how it illuminates the enterprise of political philosophy in general. In so doing, I shall revisit the problem I registered in the introduction of the thesis: the prevalent perception of a moral crisis in contemporary political life. I shall suggest that the dynamic account of DH raises important implications surrounding the precise nature of that crisis: it helps us better understand *what the crisis we are confronted with is really about*. In this sense, whilst the insights of the novel account of DH and political morality I have developed here might appear to be bleak and pessimistic, this is only because we have unrealistic expectations of what political morality involves in the first place. In short, our sense of the crisis is misguided. The crisis we are confronted with is not political or moral *per se* but philosophical: it relates to the concepts we employ and certain assumptions which contemporary philosophers and commentators in general as well as

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133 *In the Beginning Was the Deed*, 52

standard DH theorists in particular have unquestioningly inherited from Plato and the Enlightenment project.

## **8.2. The Dynamic Account of DH: A Synopsis**

Throughout this thesis, I sought to articulate a new perspective on political morality by developing: i) a new critique of the standard dirty hands (DH) thesis and ii) a novel, dynamic interpretation of the DH problem. In doing so, I sought to help us better understand *what it really means to have DH in politics*.

Whilst the affinity between Machiavelli's political thought and the standard DH thesis is taken for granted, in this thesis I have demonstrated that standard DH theorists in fact displace the Florentine's insights on political ethics, moral conflict and pluralism. In particular, I have argued that the standard DH thesis is inadequately 'static': it conceives the conflict between morality and politics as a single, stark and rare paradox of action - a mere tragic anomaly which disrupts the normality of past and future harmony. Consequently, the orthodox way of thinking about DH in politics misconceives *the extent of the rupture between morality and politics*: Machiavelli's vision is supplanted by an unsatisfactory vision of honesty, innocence and harmony. But the standard DH thesis also mischaracterizes *the precise nature of such a conflict*. For, Machiavelli does not say that one must merely 'learn how not to act well'. Rather, Machiavelli is adamant that 'one must learn how not to be good'. In connection to this, I have suggested that there exists a discrepancy between innocence as the absence of wrongdoing - which, as standard DH theorists emphasize, is lost following one's confrontation with a paradox of action - and innocence as a disposition - which is irretrievably forfeited once one takes Machiavelli's advice to heart and heeds the standards of excellence conducive to a virtuous politics. The upshot of this, as I have explained, is that conceptualizing the conflict between morality and politics as a paradox of action is not enough: the standard DH thesis' overemphasis on action fails to capture the way moral character enters politics and jeopardizes political existence. In other words,

innocence is not merely passive as DH theorists typically assume: something which is only acted upon and thereby tragically tainted following one's confrontation with a paradox of action. Rather, it has an active sense: innocence is itself a source of political incompetence, tragedy and disaster. What has emerged from my critique of the standard DH thesis then, is that that thesis - by virtue of its failure to take Machiavelli's insights seriously - fails to live up to its purported capacity to capture the complexity and messiness of political ethics. It is too tidy and does not sufficiently depart from the idealism it professes to challenge: the Platonic Ideal or the doctrine of final rational harmony.

Thus, the novel account of DH I sought to develop in this thesis, constituted an attempt to reinterpret and capture the problem of DH in politics in all its complexity. Simply put, by developing a dynamic account of DH I have attempted to restore Machiavelli's insights on political ethics and conflict which have been displaced by the orthodox and modern interpretation of DH. This was achieved by turning to MacIntyre's account in *After Virtue*. MacIntyre's negative thesis, I have argued, offers a historical explanation as to why proponents of the standard DH thesis displace Machiavelli's thought: they have inherited from post-Enlightenment ideal theories a non-teleological worldview. In developing a dynamic account of DH, I used elements from MacIntyre's positive thesis as a theoretical premise upon which I grounded Machiavelli's insights on political agency, integrity and *virtù*. Hence, the key insight of the dynamic account is that approaching political morality and the problem of DH entails conceiving political life as *a whole*. And this, as I have explained, involves approaching *politics as a practice* and *a way of life*. In other words, we are required to consider the dispositions, virtues, agency and integrity of those aspiring to lead a virtuous political life.

To cut a long story short, approaching *politics as a practice* - as an activity with goods, values and standards of excellence internal to itself - provides us with: i) a concrete approach for grounding ethics contra to the abstract rules advanced by contemporary

philosophy; and ii) quasi-dynamic ethical standards, as it enables us to identify certain distinct dispositions of character conducive to political excellence. Conceiving politics in terms of abstract and universal *action-guiding* rules and principles as deontologists, consequentialists and standard DH theorists do, misconstrues and oversimplifies the concrete realities and complex requirements of political practice. It also misrepresents the qualities of character necessary for participating in politics and meeting its demands and ends. Put simply, the standards of political excellence arise from *within* politics as opposed to any external moral standpoint. But, as I have suggested, we are also required to conceive *politics as a way of life* - that is, we should explicitly approach politics in dynamic or narrative terms. For, in the absence of such a dynamic approach, we are inevitably bound to fail to fully capture the essence of political integrity and certain distinct dispositions and actions that hold together a virtuous political life. And, as I have illustrated, one political virtue which we cannot fully make sense of without a dynamic approach is hypocrisy. This vice is not only one of the necessary qualities that politicians should cultivate whilst unlearning a portion of their virtue and exhibit for strategic or political purposes. Hypocrisy also forms a coping mechanism for concealing the rest of the vices or the moral remainder inherent in political actions: it enables politicians to marshal on amidst conflict; it constitutes the glue that holds together a virtuous life of politics.

The key insight of the dynamic account of DH then, is that a fundamental re-orientation in the way we approach the problem of DH and political morality is required: if we want to make sense of DH and political ethics, we should turn our attention neither to ordinary moral virtue nor to mere ‘snapshot’ or ‘episodic’ acts of moral wrongdoing. For, as I have argued, at the core of the dynamic account of DH lies Machiavelli’s recognition that the conflict between morality and politics is perpetual and cuts much deeper than a mere *incompatibility of action-guiding prescriptions*: it also involves a conflict between (at least) *two incompatible ways of life* each with its own ends, virtues and standards of excellence. In this sense, the problem of DH in politics does not merely involve *a paradox of action* (or

even a continuous series of these): it also involves *a paradox of character*. Conducive to politics as a practice and way of life is the cultivation and exhibition of certain ordinary moral vices: the toughness and cruelty of the lion and, more importantly, the experience, cunningness and deception of the fox.

What additionally lies at the core of the dynamic account of DH is the recognition that politics is a much messier and grubbier domain of practice than most philosophers in general and standard DH theorists in particular recognize. In other words, whilst elucidating the dynamic account of DH, I sought to consider the complexity of politics and the context in which politicians operate more carefully. For, as I have suggested, we cannot fully make sense of DH and political ethics if we do not acknowledge the peculiarities and messiness of politics - that is, without considering certain ends and concepts which are distinctive of politics as a practice and way of life: the peculiarity of political relationships and the centrality of power, conflict and dependence to this activity. The dynamic account of DH, then, captures the Machiavellian recognition that conflict is not manifested only with respect to individual morality - between an admirable moral life and a life of politics. Rather, it is also manifested externally: politics as a practice and a way of life involves a perpetual conflict and competition for power between different but mutually dependent political agents or groups, each with its own incompatible aspirations and interests. It is this very recognition, I have argued, which partially shapes political actions, decisions as well as the distinctive nature of political integrity. Put another way, it is the recognition that conflict is also manifested externally that partially sustains the rupture between a moral and a political life. Since politicians are not self-sufficient - in other words, political agents operate in a domain of perpetual conflict and dependence- knowledge and experience of how to manoeuvre in such a messy context is a crucial fox-like characteristic of a virtuous politician. Again, the point here is that the problem of DH and political ethics arise from *within* politics.

My primary aim in this thesis was, therefore, to contribute to the literature on DH - by exposing and correcting its philosophical limitations as well as the idealistic and tidy account of political ethics that emerges from it. In addition, the discussion I have advanced in this thesis has revealed that there exists an overlooked and unacknowledged split within the contemporary tradition of DH: between those who explicitly embrace Walzer's conventional but nonetheless 'static' and idealistic conceptualization of the problem (Steve de Wijze, Tom Goodwin, Michael Stocker, Christopher Gowans, Suzanne Dovi and Anthony Cunningham for instance) and philosophers who we may describe as DH theorists (such as Bernard Williams, Stuart Hampshire, Martin Hollis, Sue Mendus and Richard Bellamy) but who conceptualize DH in a different and more nuanced way - one which is sensitive to Machiavelli's insights on political ethics, pluralism and conflict.

What I want to additionally emphasize here however, is that the dynamic account of DH does not constitute a mere archaeological artefact - something that is of an abstract and historical interest but of little or limited relevance to our contemporary political and ethical cosmos. So, whilst my primary endeavour in this thesis was to restore Machiavelli's lost insights on DH and political ethics, it does not follow that the dynamic account of DH has nothing to say about political ethics in the context of contemporary liberal democracies. Whilst restoring Machiavelli's political thought I also sought to make the Florentine tell us something about *us* and *our* politicians. And, in so doing, I sought to expose the limitations of our conceptions of political morality. Machiavelli's world, as I have demonstrated, is not that different from ours: the Machiavellian insights of the dynamic account of DH - the perpetuity of conflict in *individual* as well as *societal* political ethics - constitute a real and inescapable issue for our contemporary politics. To be more specific, I have argued that modern democratic societies are somehow implicated in promoting and exacerbating the necessity of certain vices - or, at least, some manifestations of the vices. For, modern democratic politics entails a quest for order, stability and power in conditions of conflict and dependence; democratic societies are composed by a plurality of conflicting and

incompatible traditions, each with its own aspirations, interests as well as substantive conceptions of justice. The upshot of this, I have argued, is that conflicting loyalties, antipathies, sleazy handshakes and compromises, treacheries, hypocritical dissimulation and, in certain instances, even the solicitous use and toleration of cruelty cannot be eliminated from the practice of contemporary democratic politics as standard DH theorists and political moralists like to assume.

The general point here is that the contemporary relevance of the dynamic account of DH compels us to reconsider *what it means to lead a virtuous life of politics in the context of contemporary, liberal democratic societies*. In doing so, the dynamic account does not just contribute to the literature of DH. It also illuminates the discipline of political philosophy as a whole. In the next section, I want to say a bit more on how the dynamic account achieves this by revisiting the problem I registered in chapter 1: the growing perception of a moral crisis in contemporary political life.

### **8.3. Reflections on a Crisis: Insights from the Dynamic Account of DH**

I began this thesis by registering a conviction which is rather prevalent amongst contemporary philosophers and public pundits: that we are confronted with a moral crisis in modern political life. In the background of such a narrative of crisis, I have suggested, lurks a popular way of reflecting on political morality - one which is underpinned by a particular perception on *what political philosophy is or should be doing*. On this account, political philosophy should involve a quest for an ideal theory: it should aspire to conceive and revive the perfect society and individual. At the core of an ideal theory, I have repeated, lies what Stuart Hampshire (1987) and Isaiah Berlin (1969; 1990) term the doctrine of final rational harmony or the Platonic Ideal. For, regardless of its specific content, every ideal theory since antiquity postulates that individual or societal ethics can be understood in a unified and harmonious way that allows for the possibility of perfection. Hence the narrative

of the moral crisis: our politics is presently a dirty and unsavoury business - moral goodness has been eroded by conflict, vice and outrageous acts of moral wrongdoing. But this does not entail that it is impossible to clean up political life *per se*. On the one hand, when it comes to individual political morality, ideal theorists tend to believe that the dispositions, virtues, actions and integrity political agents should exhibit can (and should) be perfectly harmonized with those which characterize a moral or a purely private individual. On the other hand, when it comes to societal life, they suggest that it is not implausible to discover certain common and substantive values and interests that are universal and mutually shared across seemingly different but rational public agents. And, in so doing they claim, we shall also find ourselves one step closer to individual perfection in modern political life. For, as I have explained in chapter 7, there would be no need for political compromise, nor the mutual antipathies, betrayals and hypocrisies that are typically associated with it.

What is worth highlighting here is that most discussions of moral crisis in contemporary politics convey a picture similar to the one painted by standard DH theorists: that we are confronted with a 'static' problem. In other words, it is typically assumed that we live in a society which is ridden with vice, disintegration as well as internal and external conflict and that it is *only* in *our* politics and society where these features tend to be observed. Regardless of the precise timeline of the unravelling of this crisis, there once existed an era in which moral and political virtue were harmonized. Or, so it is thought. And, according to this account, the rehabilitation of political ethics is intertwined with the rediscovery of something lost: the notion of ordinary moral goodness and innocence as an integral aspect of political virtue. In connection to this, proponents of the narrative of crisis also suggest that the crisis we are confronted with is, in its nature and character, a *political crisis* - that is, a crisis which is primarily associated with *the content of political morality*. Again, what underpins this assumption is the very conviction that political philosophy should involve a quest for an ideal theory. For, whilst difficult to practically dispense with, conflict and imperfection in individual and societal political ethics are always bound to be

the product of unintelligible public arrangements and irrational or wicked lapses of our public agents. At least in theory, a rational solution to (apparent) conflicts that allows for the possibility of perfection must exist.

The argument I have developed in this thesis suggests that our sense of the crisis is misdirected: we mistakenly believe that we are confronted with a moral or political crisis in contemporary politics precisely because we have an unsatisfactorily idealistic understanding of what political morality involves in the first place. To be sure, this need not deny that some of the scandals that periodically hit the headlines are uncongenial to a virtuous politics. Nor is this to suggest that we are not confronted with any political and social problems *at all*. Nonetheless, the critique of the standard DH thesis as well as the dynamic account of DH I have articulated here urges us to reject this popular narrative of crisis and the moralistic account of political ethics which underpins it. And, in so doing, it helps us better understand *what the crisis we are confronted with is really about*.

To put it bluntly, the crisis we are confronted with is neither ‘static’ nor is it political or moral *per se*. Our crisis is far from static precisely because, as I have repeated throughout this thesis, politics and morality can *never* be harmonized. The idea that we live in a society which is ridden with conflict and imperfection and that it is only in our society and our politics where these features are observed constitutes a gross and historically unfounded exaggeration. And this is not because conflict and imperfection in political ethics merely constitute an unfortunate characteristic of practical politics. Rather, conflict is intrinsic to political morality. As Stuart Hampshire puts it:

Everywhere ... the mark of vitality is conflict ... the historical development of a state or society depends on the competition between different social groups in an unceasing struggle for power. This is the engine of history and we do not expect it to come to a dead stop, although in some of despair we may indulge in a fantasy of a final stage, of a Utopia, or we may dream of ... harmony, as Plato did after the

failures of Athenian democracy. Nowhere is there evidence ... of a sovereign reason that can secure consensus, the end of conflict, a uniform order, a harmony of interests, the heavenly city of philosophers (1993: 46).

This much also applies to conflict within individual political morality: the vision that there once existed a paradise lost where politics was harmonious, sanitized and conducted by angels or saints constitutes a romantic and moralistic fairy-tale. A virtuous political life becomes impossible without the cultivation and exhibition of the vices of the lion and the fox. Whilst such qualities are uncongenial to an admirable moral life, they are nonetheless conducive to the sustainment of a virtuous life of politics: they aid practitioners of politics to satisfy some of the ends of their practice.

The point here is that the aspiration for perfection and serenity in individual and societal political ethics is *philosophically* unwarranted and practically impossible. Differently put, it is the very assumption that political philosophy should involve a quest for an ideal theory, harmony and perfection which is at fault. As I have repeated throughout this thesis, the innocent optimism which emerges from this conviction ends up misrepresenting political life: it mischaracterizes the qualities conducive to virtuous political practice, the nature of political integrity as well as the peculiarities of political relationships and the messy context in which politicians operate. This insight of the dynamic account of DH is also acknowledged by Callicles in *The Gorgias* who, in a Machiavellian fashion, objects to Socrates' and Plato's conviction on what the point of political philosophy should be:

If a man is exceptionally gifted and yet pursues philosophy far on in life, he must prove entirely unacquainted with all the accomplishments requisite for a gentleman and man of distinction. Such men know nothing of the laws in their cities, or of the language they should use in their business associations ... with other men, or of human pleasures and appetites, and in a word they are completely without experience of men's characters (484c – 485b).

What follows from all this is that our crisis is primarily philosophical and conceptual neither political nor moral *per se*: it relates to the concepts we employ and presuppose when we contemplate political ethics. This crisis, I have suggested, initiated from Plato and was further compounded by the Enlightenment's rejection of teleological ethics.

And it is precisely because such an obsession with harmony is still deeply entrenched in the way we think about political morality that the argument I have pursued here might mistakenly strike some political philosophers as excessively dark, depressing and pessimistic - or, perhaps, too inchoate and unambitious. By contrast, the dynamic account of DH suggests that, it is only by rejecting such moralistic fantasies and correcting our misconceptions about what political morality involves that we can better appreciate the point and limits of politics. In connection to this, it is worth emphasizing two intertwined points here. The first is a note of reassurance: it does not follow that in politics anything goes. Precisely because the standards of political excellence arise from within politics, it does not necessarily follow that any manifestation of the vices will do - especially when it jeopardizes some of the fundamental ends of political life, such as a modicum of order, stability and civility. To put it simply, the dynamic account of DH - by virtue of its Machiavellian affiliations - does not suggest that the exhibition of abstract cruelty and hypocrisy is conducive to a virtuous life of politics. For, as I have argued, a necessary prerequisite of political virtue is the fox-like quality of experience: a certain kind of knowledge of both the messy realities, requirements and feasible ends of politics as well as knowledge of oneself. This brings us to the second point which is a note of caution. It is not just that the quest for perfection and harmony in individual and societal political ethics is impossible. It can also prove dangerous, and indeed catastrophic, for political life. The unrestrained quest for utopian ideals in politics denotes a certain absence of knowledge and experience. And it is such a lack of experience which constitutes the mark of innocent individuals and which disqualifies them from a virtuous life of politics and renders them too

dangerous for politics. This much, as I have illustrated, is evident (amongst others) in the literary examples of William Shakespeare's Henry and Brutus, Jean-Paul Sartre's Hugo as well as the real-life examples of Robespierre and Senator Schwarzenegger. Now, for those who still find the dynamic account of DH overtly depressing and pessimistic, I can do no better than refer them back to the capricious and eloquent remark from Bernard Williams, which I have cited in the title quote of this chapter: politics is pretty much a mess, and largely inescapably so. The dynamic account of DH, unapologetically and unashamedly, reflects that fact.

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