University of Southampton

POLITICAL ACTION AND MORAL JUDGMENT

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Contents

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

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POLITICAL ACTION AND MORAL JUDGMENT

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The aim of the discussion is to elucidate a range of problems
in political morality. The central theme which unites these
problems is the question of the role played by moral judgment
in politics and the limits of its application. A variety of
perspectives are considered in terms of their implications
for the character of political commitment and its relation
with the moral identity of agents. An associated assessment
is made of the adequacy of these perspectives with a view
to coming to a deeper understanding of the problem of
political morality.

   Critical accounts are given of central treatments of politics
and ethics in the modern era; most particularly by reference
to the works of Machiavelli, Kant and J.S.Mill. Lessons are
drawn from these assessments and subsequently applied to the
central problem via a consideration of the contemporary
literature. Conclusions are drawn concerning the key features
of modern political agency which set the terms for a
re-formulated understanding of political morality with
particular reference to the moral character of agents and to
notions of moral virtue.

   The resulting account is further examined through attention
to the context of modern political practice, most notably in
relation to the problematic manifestations of revolutionary
commitment and political terror in the twentieth century. A
variety of perspectives upon the case of the Russian Revolution
are examined with an eye to assessing their implications for
for the relationship between political commitment and moral
judgment. This includes reference to the writings of Marx. In
conclusion, the discussion is broadened to consider the
relevance of classical thought - particularly that of Aristotle -
and to take account of wider implcations for the idea of
community and for the role of political theory.

> Must one also pay for the deeds
> which were right and necessary?
>   N.S.Rubashov
>
> (Arthur Koestler: Darkness at Noon)

The following discussion centres upon a particular problem associated with political morality. The aim is to explore the manner in which, in the context of questions of agency and innovation, politics may be seen to occupy a problematic and uncertain place with respect to morality. Elucidating the full depth and character of this difficulty will entail an assessment of the sense in which moral problems might be recognised in the context of political action directed toward what, in political terms, may be understood as the 'good'. The disturbing fact that, in a political context, one may have to act 'badly' in order to act 'well' renders the problem of 'dirty hands' a central one.

A study of this issue must give recognition to the attention it has drawn in the context of broader approaches to politics and morality from thinkers in the modern age. An assessment will be made of the perspectives which derive from key modern thinkers on this question. The point will not be to contextualise the problem through a study in the 'history of ideas': Rather, it will be to chart the way that the problem manifests itself in the modern political arena and the sense in which the form of this manifestation might relate to and might challenge theoretical attempts to resolve it.

It will be argued that these considerations testify to a broader approach to ethics and politics which in its turn specifies a distinctive modern perspective upon the persistent problem of political agency. The aim will be to assess the adequacy of this perspective in the light of attention to concrete features of 'dirty hands' problems as they occur for substantive moral agents.

Problematic theoretical attempts to resolve the
'dirty hands' question may equally provide a context within
which available self-conceptions and forms of commitment
develop. An assessment will be made of the resultant
disturbing patterns of judgment and agency and of the
threat these may pose to moral identity.

To this extent, it will be possible to address the
'urgency'of the problem in relation to modern politics.
It is in the modern arena that politics has manifested a
tendency toward <u>terror</u> of a particularly acute and extensive
sort. There is a sense in which we might regard the
practice of political terror as a particular, albeit .
extreme, exemplification of a larger category of morally
problematic political agency - especially in so far as the
condemnation of terror might be thought of as problematic
in the light of the more general moral difficulty. However,
even if this is so, it proves a highly significant
phenomenon in that it is suggestive of a political context
made distinctive not only because a larger scale of
potentially unacceptable action is prompted but also
because an eradication of any moral limits at all is
intimated.

In so far as the task of attending to the full depth
of 'dirty hands' problems prompts questions concerning the
kinds of commitments that inform modern political agency,
the discussion will concern itself with the character of
those commitments as moral orientations available to agents.
Accordingly, the need can be identified for an assessment
of the dispositions and self-conceptions which are appropriate
to politics and which render it a realm accessible to moral
individuals.

A sustained analysis of these features of political
morality may provide us with the basis for a constructive
response to George Orwell's lament that in modern politics
one has, all too often, to act "like a devil or a lunatic".

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I : Introduction

A characteristic feature of politics and the exercise of power in the twentieth century has been the consistent resort to terror, violence and deception on a massive scale. The political arena has not, of course, been without instances of brutality in the service of nothing more than simple self-interest. However, a more telling feature has been the way in which various sorts of commitments (to political reform or social change, to ideals, to duty) adopted in good faith and treated with the utmost seriousness have issued in policies and actions which are morally shocking. This phenomenon appears increasingly as a hallmark of modern politics, culminating in the excesses of our century which manifests a moral 'vertigo' of unparallelled proportions. Death, brutality and suffering have become insignificant in the face of the increasingly broad and self-referential character of political justification.

Along side this, we can identify the twentieth century as an era of massive upheaval informed by claims of radicalism and the commitment to revolutionary social change. Generally, although by no means exclusively, the drastic moral consequences of political commitments have been associated with revolutionary agency and the exercise of revolutionary power. The commitment to the rightness of a cause and the pre-occupation with effecting transformation in the light of the good of mankind appear, in the modern context, as the mainsprings of moral scepticism and the loss of a 'human' dimension to politics.

In the light of this, we are forced to consider the precise relationship between the two phenomena: Is it the case that political claims of this sort necessarily carry with them an abandonment of ethical criteria in practice? An answer to this question, in the context of the twentieth century experience requires us to examine whether any adequate response to the problem of political morality can be formulated within the framework of the Marxist tradition.

However, as we have noted, this phenomenon of the de-
valuation' of ethics in the light of political claims is
not to be found exclusively in the revolutionary context.
In order to identify the genesis of the problem, we have to
cast the net rather wider. This is not to say that the
problem manifests itself in precisely the same way with
respect to revolutionary claims as it does in what we might
call 'normal' or non-innovative politics. However, in both
cases a range of issues surrounding the idea of character-
istically political claims, responsibilities and
justifications is invoked: The fact that Marxism grounds
itself in questions of universal social transformation does
not negate the specifically political dimension to its
project.

In this sence, there is a certain common ground to which
we might refer in attempting to understand the roots of the
problem. We need to identify a certain common way of
understanding and theorizing political ethics which is
characteristic of the modern era.[1]

There is a sense in which such questions, in various
different theoretical contexts, resolve themselves into an
opposition between claims concerning political necessity and
questions of moral principle. This fundamental conception
appears to provide a general framework within which
particular treatments of and responses to the problem have
been formulated. I shall argue that this is a result of
particular ways of thinking about politics and morality
which are dominant in the modern era and that it finds a
place in the wider context of a specific approach in political
theory. Further, I shall contend that this has profound
implications for the way in which political action manifests
itself.

In the light of this, we are able to examiine critically
a range of possible responses to this problem which attempt
to give a more adequate account of the relationships
involved. And we can formulate more clearly, through this,
the distinctions between institutionalized politics and what
is involved in the practice of change and innovation.

To clarify the character of these problems we might usefully refer to the powerful indictment of the Soviet revolutionary project provided by Authur Koestler in Darkness at Noon. In the novel, Koestler provides us with an account of the ways in which the political dynamics of the revolution leads its participants into an ethical vacuum from which there appears to be no escape. Equally, however, we encounter in the novel a range of moral positions which serves to extend the terrain of the problem. We can identify in the structure of the narrative ways in which the moral aspects of revolution become attenuated in the context of thinking that is characteristic of a wider modern approach to the issue. Marxism fails to be special in this sense.

It is worth giving considerable attention to Darkness at Noon for two reasons. First because it raises in dramatic form crucial questions and difficulties concerning political ethics and, further, does so in a way that allows us to identify dimension to the problems which appear as intrinsic to political practice and, by contrast, those which characterise the problem as it emerges in the specific context of revolution. Second, the dynamics of the book impress upon the reader the way in which a particular orientation to this problem may result in the movement toward an increasingly disturbing mode of political thought and action.[2] In the following examination, I shall attempt to bring out and pursue those aspects of the drama which prove useful for an adequate initial characterization of the issue.

A central theme appears as one of moral uncertainty. The veteran revolutionary Rubashov is for the first time alienated from the political struggle: languishing in his prison cell, he is free from the practical demands of the struggle and moral reflection becomes available to him. It is in this context that the moral problem raises its head for Rubashov.

Further, for the first time, he is on the receiving end of the party logic; accused of crimes he did not commit he becomes a sacrifice, just as he has sacrificed many in

the past; he is betrayed by his party on the grounds of political necessity, just as he has betrayed many in the past on similar grounds. In this situation his ethical certainty begins to disintegrate; every objection to the treatment meted out to him becomes an objection to his own past conduct. His experience, then, leads him to formulate moral doubts of a certain sort. The claims of conscience, of the "sympathy, disgust, despair, repentence and atonement" which are for the Bolshevik, "...repellent debauchery"[3] take on a new persuasiveness in the mind of Rubashov.

But this moral transition is far from unproblematic. We find in Rubashov's review of his own past a review of the ethical and political history of the revolution and its slide into systematic terror. In the course of this, we see Rubashov attempting to come to terms with that history and his own part in it, and thus to re-define his own moral position with respect to history and to his executioners.

He remains a revolutionary and the political perspective which has been the foundation of his own career and that of his party still appears as the only one available to him and to them: for the good of mankind all means are justified. When one acts to change the world, one acts on the level of history and ordinary moral rules cannot apply.

At the same time, Rubashov is compelled at this late stage to voice his doubts; but their precise nature as he initially voices them is highly significant. The revolution, which had started out from premisses that seemed absolutely compelling appeared to have lost its way.

> There was no certainty; only the appeal to
> that mocking oracle they called history,
> who gave her sentence only when the jaws
> of the appealer had long since fallen into
> dust.[4]

This points to a defect in the process of reasoning: An absence of certainty where certainty appears as a necessary foundation for the moral rationale of revolution. In this sense, although the ends justify the means, the relation between action in the present and the posited end of the

just society eludes the cognitive grasp of the agent.
There is still room for the question of what is to be done
and the logic of history appears to deliver no definite
answer.

Rubashov's claims indicate that a crucial flaw in the
revolutionary project appears as a brand of cognitive
failure. The mastery of history promised by the scientific
approach proves an unattainable goal: the facts remain
recalcitrant and the future contingent. This is confirmed
when Rubashov reflects upon the certainty, the faith in
reason, which has informed his political career and has
sanctioned numerous injustices and betrayals:

> ...how can the present decide what will
> be judged true in the future? ...We replaced
> vision with logical deduction; but although
> we all started from the same point of departure,
> we came to divergent results. Proof disproved
> proof and finally we had to recur to faith,
> to axiomatic faith in one's own reasoning.[5]

But Rubashov's belief in this infallibility of reason has
started to disintegrate.

It is revealing that Rubashov's loss of belief in his
own power of cognitive certainty goes hand in hand with the
disintegration of his relationship with the party. The
revolutionary enterprise finds a grounding for its ethical
rationale in a reference to the party. In the process of
expelling a comrade who has 'deviated' from the party line,
Rubashov remarks that,

> The Party can never be mistaken... You
> and I can make a mistake not the Party.
> The Party comrade, is more than you or
> I and a thousand others like you and I.
> The Party is the embodiment of the
> revolutionary idea in history. History
> knows no scruples and no hesitation...
> He who has not absolute faith in history
> does not belong in the Party's ranks.[6]

Here, then, we witness a movement from the faith in
consequential reason as the rationale for action to faith in
the transcendent party which is its own guarantee. Why should
this movement occur? An answer to this must refer to the
specifically revolutionary character of the political context.

The revolutionaries are committed consequentialists who
justify all means by reference to what they will achieve:
but it becomes difficult to see how the consequential
equation of means and ends can be rationally specified.
How does one know which means lead to which ends? This
question, which, as we have noted, informs the guise in
which Rubashov initially frames his moral doubts, is clearly
less problematic in relation to consequentialism where the
ends are defined in terms of, for example, individual self-
interest or desire.[7] Here an adequate mediation between ends
and means is provided by the agent. Equally, we might say
that in cases where one can identify a determinate frame of
reference for activity i.e. a reliable background to events,
a causal mechanism becomes available by which consequential
judgments might be made.[8] However, in the case of Darkness
at Noon we are dealing with action on the level of history -
action directed at wholesale innovation and in this context
the relationship between means and ends in the widest sense
(a sense which is demanded by the revolution where the ends
are broadly conceived as the just society) is apparently
inaccessible. An external guarantee of necessity is
required and the role is filled by the Party understood as
the "embodiment of the revolutionary idea in history", and
therefore as right by definition. Transcendent of any
individual decision it becomes the guarantee of a causal
relationship between action in the present and revolutionary
ends.

But a further dimension to the issue makes matters
more complicated. Rubashov experiences doubt and
uncertainty which appear to run deeper than that which his
varbalizations can capture. His initial analyses of the
problems accruing to revolutionary action appear inadequate
in the light of nagging doubts which transcend the cognitive
problem. A dimension emerges which is rooted entirely in
the present rather than in the relation between present and
future.

An embryonic recognition of this further moral dimension
makes itself apparent when Rubashov attempts to distinguish

between the betrayal of a comrade for the sake of the
party line and the killing of counterrevolutionary troops
during the civil war; the latter he would do again, the
former he begins to regret. But what could be the basis
of such a distinction? Both, it appears can be justified
consequentially. Nevertheless, Rubashov feels that in the
case of betrayal, he has committed a crime for which he
must pay. However, this mode of judgment itself appears
extendable;

> Must one also pay for the deeds which
> were right and necessary?[9]

Rubashov's distinction, even if it stands on its own terms,
appears consistently to fade in the light of his feeling of
moral guilt. Betrayal is seen as lying "on a different
plane" from action in the civil war: it represents the
sacrifice of any real ethical perspective for the sake of
an arbitrary reference to the necessary authority of the
Party. It contrasts with what is "right and necessary".[10]

However, even on the grounds of a reasoned consequent-
ialism, there remains, in Rubashov's mind, the idea of a
moral price to be paid. The issue is no longer simply one
of judgment but of moral consciousness and the question
of motive becomes relevant.

> Did the righteous man perhaps carry
> the heaviest debt when weighed by
> this other measure? Was his debt
> perhaps counted double - for the
> others knew not what they did?[11]

This 'other measure', not one of reason and instrumental
logic, but of immanent ethical consciousness appears to
transform the moral horizon. Rubashov dismisses these
questions as "a breath of religious madness".[12] However,
it is precisely this problematic encounter between the claim
of consequential justification and the voice of moral
conscience which plays a decisive role in Rubashov's
tortuous route toward confession.

We discover here an apparent collision between two
ethical perspectives which reveals an aspect to the issue
of political agency that transcends the particular problems
associated with the radicalism of the bolshevik project.

The indeterminacy of revolutionary goals, resulting in
problems concerning the possibility of consequential
justifications, may be a difficulty which attaches itself
to the idea of real social transformation; but the moral
doubts which take root in Rubashov's mind, and which he
finds himself incapable of fully articulating, speak of a
wider difficulty.

This becomes clearer when we consider the choice that
Rubashov sees himself as facing. He must either confess
to his 'counterrevolutionary mentality' - an option which
would further the interests of the Party (and, he thinks,
would save him such that he could later re-enter the
struggle) or he must die in defiant silence. But
sacrificing himself on a point of principle runs counter
to Rubashov's life-long moral and political perspective:
it contributes nothing to the cause.

Silence is inimical to Rubashov's whole life-project
but it is precisely in the form of a silent presence that
his deep-seated moral doubts become compelling. The
'grammatical fiction' of the moral self, seat of conscience,
is not negotiable - its silence is precisely the mark of
its implacability. In this sense, his moral consciousness
takes on a reference which transcends particular political
commitments. His attempts to reason through to a solution
are therefore necessarily inadequate.

> ...The realm of the 'grammatical fiction'
> seemed to begin just where the 'thinking
> to a conclusion' ended.[13]

The facticity of suffering and death becomes itself a moral
index which is necessarily absolute: his conception of
political justification, historical consequentialist reason,
must pass over this realm. Thus, to <u>recognise</u> it is, for
Rubashow, to lose everything.

Of course, revolutionary consequentialism remains the
foundation of Rubashov's political perspective and his
interrogator Ivanov is well aware of this. Ivanov invokes
consequentialist reason as the ground upon which Rubashov
has a duty to condemn himself. Conscience, in this context,

becomes a 'temptation' which if indulged in, devours the
revolution. Rubashov finds this argument incontravertible
on its own terms. He can only respond by citing the
catalogue of brutality and terror which has reduced the
average life-expectancy of the population by a quarter. For
Ivanov, of course, this is a necessity which has to be faced;
it is a matter for moral strength not moralistic indulgence.

Rubashov wishes to respond by reference to the echo
he hears of the voices of executed comrades. But,
...he knew this answer made no sense.[14]
The language of conscience and that of expediency can gain
no purchase upon one another: Rubashov's political reason
and his moral consciousness become irrelevant with respect
to one another.

In this revealing passage, Rubashov can only respond by
raising the cognitive problem of indeterminacy. How can we
be certain that any particular action in the present admits
of consequential justification by virtue of its contributing
to the ultimate end of revolution? From this moment, Ivanov
has won the debate: A degree of trial and error, he says,
is an inevitable feature of historical innovation: it forms
part and parcel of the sacrifice which a "great experiment"
demands.

We can see from Rubashov's experience a sense in which,
if one is prepared to countenance moral claims of a
particular sort, all political debate becomes a positive
danger. Equally, both appear to demand a certain commitment
towards acting in the world, which means that embracing one
is something one does at the risk of eclipsing the other.

For this reason, when Rubashov is forced to transfer
the focus of debate from conscience to the question of the
availability of ends, we reach a crucial turning point in
the drama. As we have seen, the political position which
informs Rubashov's career leads, in the context of a brand
of moral reflection, to a particular tension. It is a
tension the structure of which specifies its unbearable
nature.

The subsequent phase of the novel brings us back to
an earlier point. Ultimately, Ivanov's approach is held
to be inadequate and he is replaced by the second
interrogator, Gletkin; and the demands placed upon Rubashov
take on a different character. Gletkin is not 'old guard'
and he does not share the burden of the past which both
Rubashov and Ivanov carry on their shoulders. Equally,
his method and his way of thinking are different. His
rationale is one of absolute faith in the Party and an
overarching sense of duty. Gletkin appears to embody the
transformation in the character of the revolution itself
from a radical commitment to rational agency and the truths
of history to a grim, bureaucratic instrumentality. He
appears at the same time to represent the necessary product
of the original bolshevik commitment. The ethical novelty
of this commitment lay in its consequential vision of
radical political ends; however, the result appears to be
a form of moral arbitrariness. Anything, it seems, may be
justified on the grounds of political necessity and a sense
of immanent moral judgment falls away. What figures for
the 'old guard' as a positive transcendence, part of the
revolutionary process itself, becomes a way of life in and
of itself.[15]

The contrast with Gletkin's bureaucratic instrumentality
is to be found in the difference between his impersonal
methods and the more subtle reasoning of Ivanov. The latter,
as we have noted, shares a history with Rubashov and is able
(and prepared) to understand him. At the end of his
interrogation, Ivanov reveals the extent to which he has a
grasp of the position of Rubashov: he too is familiar with
the burden of conscience but urges Rubashov to suppress
such feelings.

> When the accursed inner voice speaks
> to you, hold your hands over your ears.[16]

The new party requires its operatives to be, like Gletkin,
purged of such difficulties. The dialogue between Rubashov
and Ivanov reveals them both to be condemned men.

In accordance with this moral transformation, the fate

of Rubashov is also altered. As far as Gletkin is concerned
Rubashov must die. The fact that he has to be reasoned with
and that he must be convinced (or has to convince himself)
of his guilt brands him obsolete.

This raises a further issue. There is, implicit in
Rubashov's experience, and his reflections upon it, an
uncertain conception of what it is to be a moral individual
amongst other individuals. We can detect a certain degree
of sympathy in the relationship between Rubashov and Ivanov
which in a certain sort of context becomes intolerable. When
action in the present is judged by reference to the future,
on the plane of historical progress, we find outselves in
a position where the individual becomes

> ...a multitude of a million divided
> by one million.[17]

The mode of reasoning ushered in by this consequentialism
is primarily mathematical and individuals feature only in
so far as they can be incorporated into its calculations.

Rubashov reflects upon his frequent temptation to put
himself in the shoes of the other:

> Revolutionaries should not think through
> other people's minds. Or perhaps they
> should? Or even ought to? How can one
> change the world if one identifies oneself
> with everybody? How else can one change
> it? He who understands and forgives
> where would he find a motive? Where would
> he not? [18]

To feel compassion appears to present obstacles to committed
political action; but an equal danger appears to reside in
the de-humanizing process of politics conducted in the
context of an entirely calculative moral rationale.[19]

Rubashov's reflections on the possibility of identifying
oneself with others are indicative of the terms within which
he attempts to orientate himself to his situation. He
becomes aware of the possibility of immanent moral
reservations. But his attempts to formulate these
reflections such that they can be made to count in respect
of his politics fail. His moral consciousness is in this
manner, severely attenuated.

We are left, then, with a sense of extreme ethical
uncertainty. Rubashov dies having done his duty to the Party
and in doing this has paid with his life. But at the
same time, he dies unable to come to terms with the moral
nature of his career. It would, of course, be wrong to
conclude here that moral judgments of this kind could be
straightforward or lightly made. And fact remains that
Rubashov and those like him were highly serious, committed
and acting with reference to the highest of moral ends.
And equally, of course, when those commitments take on the
form of demands and threats ranged against Rubashov, they
have a similar compelling character.

In and through the various claims and relationships
which make themselves apparent in Darkness at Noon, we
find the deeply problematic character of political action
in its complex relationships with moral judgment. It seems
that it is precisely the morally serious and committed
political agent who falls into this ethical vortex. The
claims of politics and those of morality appear each to
demand an undivided attention; and in relation to a certain
sort of political commitment, morality comes to speak only
ephemerally - a disembodied voice. Thus understood, moral
demands appear only to draw us toward a withdrawl from the
political world.

We find a formulation of the problem in a way that is
suggestive of its more general character when Roy Holland
refers to the problem we have observed as indicating the
"impossibility of politics".[20] This "impossibility" is a
moral one which is affirmed against the background of an
absolute ethics. For Holland, moral judgments, if they are
to be compelling must point toward something absolute, to a
purity of goodness. Although this must confer upon moral
claims a special status.

> Such judgment is in one sense not a
> judgment at all - it does not confer
> anything, does not assign a top grading,
> but is like exclaiming at a revelation.[21]

By the same token, it represents something which has the
property of 'distance'. Goodness impresses itself upon

one in a compelling way but "without giving him the feeling
of being close to it".[22]

   In this sense, after Plato, Holland affirms an image
of goodness which is not amongst things in the world: it is
transcendent of the particularity of human affairs. In the
same way, then, that Rubashov's embryonic moral conscious-
ness fails to connect with the world he inhabits, the
absolute ethics which Holland affirms is not negotiable and
heralds a certain sort of refusal. Rubashov, as a political
man, discovers immanent ethics only in the form of a
nagging conscience with no ground upon which it can become
effective. In Holland's view, a genuine moral life can
only find its meaning through reference to the transcendental
absolute and once this is recognised, politics is forced off
the map:

> Absolute ethics is the ethics of
> forgoing and politics belongs for
> overdetermined reasons to the pursuits
> that have to be forgone.[23]

Politics is the realm of force; but ethics is "a power
without force".[24] And we can recall, here, Plato's assertion
that it is better to suffer evil than to do it.[25]

   The point for Holland is that ethics can tolerate no
encounter with relativity i.e. with compromise or with
calculation. Its mathematical counterpart is geometry
whereas the counterpart of politics is arithmetic. The
necessary purity of the former relies upon its being
transcendent of questions of quantity; it refuses to measure
on the basis of quantitive relationships. Politics, on the
other hand, is necessarily consequential - relative and
calculative.

   Politics then induces us to adopt an abstract,
instrumental perspective in which every individual counts
for 1. We find a similar view expressed in Koestler's own
condemnation of revolutionary consequentialism:

> ...men cannot be treated as units in
> operations of political arithmetic
> because they behave like the symbols
> for zero and the infinite which
> dislocate all mathematical operations.[26]

Ethics, properly grasped, makes certain absolute demands
with respect to the treatment of persons which transcends
consequential equations.

In this sense, consequentialism, when put in its proper
context designates morally impossible demands. Again
following Plato, Holland notes here that politics leads us
into claims of the form 'It is evil but I must do it' and
this is equivalent to saying 'I must not do it but I must
do it' and this is a contradiction.[27]

It is worth noting however that at the limits of the
consequential perspective, the entirely thorough consequent-
ialist would not recognise the force of a contradiction here.
The point would be that it is premature to judge particular
actions as morally wrong per se; rather we must judge by
reference only to consequences.

We glimpse this perspective when we refer back to
Darkness at Noon in the person of Gletkin. His consequent-
ialism is thorough-going and as such he represents the full
fruition of the perspective taken up and eventually
institutionalized by the generation of Rubashov and Ivanov.

There may be a difficulty here in terms of the extent
to which we can find the character of Gletkin convincing.
This problem turns upon the question of how far it is
possible to maintain an entirely consequential outlook.[28]
Rubashov and Ivanov can only maintain the line with effort
and, ultimately, at a considerable price; and it has been
noted that we cannot readily imagine the novel written from
the point of view of Gletkin.[29] However, there remains a
significant point here: what we _can_ identify is an
important tendency in the _form_ of moral recognition, which
appears to be ushered in by political activity, of which
Gletkin represents a limit.

This can be illustrated by reference to Holland's
critical treatment of an example which places the agent,
as a foreign visitor, in a position where he is given the

customary 'privilege' of saving nineteen out of twenty
natives due to be executed for protesting against their
government if he is willing to execute the remaining
native himself. Holland's criticisms strike at the
foundations of the example itself: The lack of detail and
background (combined with typically bland modes of expression)
leads us to consider the moral issue in an abstracted and
disengaged manner. We know nothing about the visitor, the
captain who puts the proposition to him; there is apparently
no audience. We are induced to reflect upon the situation
in terms set by its mere bare outline.

This has two important effects; first, we are tempted
to forget the revulsion which must be the appropriate
response to the situation and to the choice it involves;
second, related to this, we are invited to think solely
in utilitarian terms. Other possibilities (including that
of the response we might get from a saint in the position
of the agent) recede beyond the horizons determined by the
character of the example. For Holland, this means that the
true ethical nature of the case is relinquished; we are left
only with a calculative choice.

Holland's point here, is that the form of this example
is peculiarly political. The way of thinking it generates
is representative of the demands of politics. The latter is
a realm of impersonality and instrumentality; goodness, in
this context is redundant. The saint (or the one who
emulates sainthood by observing the principles of the good)
cannot tolerate these kinds of choices and so politics in
this light is indeed "impossible". Thus, in the light of
Holland's analysis we sense again the way in which the
"impossibility" of politics carries with it an implicit
threat to ethics. When we recognise that politics may
involve obligations which are serious, compelling and may
not be ignored, then the approach which such obligations
involve becomes a necessity. But the very fact that such
an approach falls outside the limits of moral judgment
means that once it is recognised as legitimate and
necessary it is ethical consciousness that finds itself
disenfranchised. The absolute limits and rules which

appear to define moral agency cannot be mapped on to human
practice when the terrain of that practice and its rationale
are shifted from qualitative considerations to instrumental
calculation.

We appear constantly to be drawn, in the political
context, toward an irrelevance of ethics in its immediate
sense. Once the decision not to withdraw has been made,
we are faced with a seemingly intractable problem the escape
from which consists in embracing a pure instrumentality.
(This is the problem which gradually comes to inform
Rubashov's reflections upon his past and his present; but
ultimately it proves impossible to sustain within the limits
of a singular moral agent) The moral certainty that
Rubashov thought he had discovered through the belief that
'the end justifies the means' proves not to be the whole
story; but at the same time it generates a perspective which
constantly demands that it should be the whole story. It
proves difficult to maintain a commitment to something which
is morally 'impossible' whilst at the same time recognising
the grounds of its impossibility.

We are faced with the sense in which the effective loss
of any immediate moral reference point can be identified as
attaching to the activity of politics not only where the
political agent applies himself solely to the utilization
of power toward his own ends (i.e. where we might say that
he usurps the legitimacy of political action) but also where
the political agent acts out of the highest of motives. It
is in this context and in this form that the problem of
'dirty hands' appears at its sharpest and most urgent.[30]

There is an additional point to be emphasised here.
The sort of retreat from instrumentality which Holland poses
against the claims of necessity must be, in fact, a
considerable one. As Holland himself notes, one is faced
with certain sorts of obligation from the very start which
carry with them the possibility of a clash with absolute
ethics. And such obligations need not necessarily be
political ones. Many other obligations could equally demand
consequential reasoning and therefore the justification of

means that are in themselves morally unacceptable. In
this sense we might be forced to consider not simply the
impossibility of politics but more than this, the
impossibility of life.

Holland claims that the issue arises in politics
in a peculiarly strong way. It is politics that brings
consequential thinking to its full fruition.[31] But why
should this be the case? One reason we might give is that
politics may require the adoption of a _systematic_
instrumentality in a way that ordinary life does not.

Political agency may be understood to be more far-
reaching in its implications with respect to the moral life
of the individual. The price Rubashov is destined to pay
for his commitment to an instrumental political programme
is death.[32] His commitment involved a vision of himself and
others as mere instruments and it is as such that he
collaborates in his own destruction. Rubashov was engaged
in such a way that instrumental necessity has to become his
complete moral rationale. The systematic demands of politics
can in this way pose a more profound threat to ethics than
do the particular instrumentalities generated by the life
of the private individual. The result of the conflict
between different sorts of commitment does not, in cases of
the latter sort, appear to prompt the possible complete
negation of moral judgment.

Political and non-political life may both involve the
problem of 'dirty hands' but the range and depth of its
implications may differ in the two cases. However, a further
significant issue arises out of this comparison. We have
not, as yet, said very much concerning the precise nature
of the demands or necessities which are generated in politics.
The fact that necessities of a similarly problematic kind
emerge in the context of private life is relevant to this
question.

It is clear that the compelling nature of the demands
or obligations in a non-political context which might create

problems of 'dirty hands' derives from the fact that they display a moral dimension. We are not here considering such necessities an individual might find powerful because they are defined in terms of personal advancement or benefit (unless such benefit has a claim for further moral reasons). Rather, in order to create a genuine problem of 'dirty hands' as we have seen, we must look to cases where the force of the necessity is independent of such factors i.e. where instrumental necessities are founded upon a genuine moral obligation.

In this sense, we cannot assume any absolute or inevitable distinction between moral considerations and expedience here. And when we turn to the political context we might find reason to doubt whether the problem can be characterized simply in terms of an absolute conflict between politics and morality per se. Clearly, in the case of _Darkness at Noon_, the revolutionaries do not act out of a sense of some purely political necessity, divorced from all moral questions. Rather, it is precisely because the political necessities they recognise are held to be internally related to a moral obligation (the obligation to fight class oppression and to create a better world) that they are compelling.

This is not to say that political obligations can always be reduced directly to some clearly defined moral end; but the nature of the obligation appears nevertheless to rest upon _some_ moral force. This becomes clearer when we attend to the position of the political agent. Involvement in political activity must entail the recognition of duties which fall upon the shoulders of the agent; duties which are made substantive in the light of the requirements gener-ated by politics itself (involving, for example, questions of strategy, power, security etc.) In a wider context, we may draw out connections between the general practice of politics in any particular social context and questions of ethics by reference to notions of legitimacy, to moral or historical ends or in some other way. However, in relation to the particular political agent in the specific situation,

we can see that imperatives are generated by political life itself which take on the form of moral demands in so far as one is a political agent.[33]

In the light of this, the problem of political ethics appears in a sense to be one which is best understood as a conflict within morality between competing moral perspectives or demands rather than indicating a simple incompatability of morality and politics.

Further, in this respect, it becomes clear that not all political duties or obligations can readily be understood to be purely expedient ones. Again, the way in which politics issues out for the particular political agent does not necessarily involve consequential action. Thus, the contrast between ethics and expediency does not prove an adequate framework within which to approach the problem. It is rather when we recognise that the political agent, in acting politically, does what is (morally) right but nevertheless comes into conflict with some other moral demand that the problem of 'dirty hands' manifests itself.

Thus, it is, as Michael Walzer suggests, a phenomenon peculiar to the moral political agent:

> ...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 his
> hands were clean.[34]

Part of the problem revealed in Darkness at Noon turns upon the way in which, in the context of a certain approach to politics and morality, the pretence (a sincere pretence) to clean hands comes to replace and negate the problem in such a way that the possibility of moral judgment recedes. Thus, it becomes crucial in attempting to respond to the failings of modern political movements and systems to examine both the way in which the relation between politics and morality has been understood and what different understandings and conclusions are available concerning the character of political action.

As we have noted, in the contemporary context, the problem of the bearing of moral considerations upon politics appears in its starkest form in revolutionary politics. The latter is not exclusive in this respect,[35] but there are distinctions to be drawn which may explain the prominence of Marxist political practice in relation to the moral problem. However these differences are best revealed through an analysis of the dominant mode of comprehending politics. The point here is to demonstrate that Marxist politics as it has been understood and put into practice in its most notorious forms, shares this mode of comprehension. And in the context of revolutionary claims, the moral problems which result from the practical application of this way of thinking are magnified.

The difficulties immanent in Darkness at Noon may best be tackled through an initial recognition of the general nature of the 'dirty hands' problem, the way it manifests itself and the way it is tackled in a range of political and theoretical contexts. Equally, such an analysis must involve attention to questions concerning the nature and role of politics. Such questions entail distinctions in respect of the relationships between political agency, public office and responsibility. Further, consideration must be given to the manner in which such relations are transformed in the context of political innovation.

Accordingly, in the following chapters we shall consider the way in which the problem of 'dirty hands' in politics has appeared in modern thinking. Subsequently, attention is given to the ways in which this issue has been obscured or denied for reasons inherent in more general aspects of political and ethical thought. This will involve reference to the traditions of liberal theory and practice and to how this issues out in terms of our conception of political and moral life. In the light of these considerations, questions concerning innovation and social dynamics will be introduced and the implications of these added dimensions examined. This will allow us to re-consider the moral issues raised with respect to the Russian revolution and its consequences, already discerned in the light of Darkness at Noon. The

question will be raised as to whether Marxism can provide
a more adequate account of political ethics and to this end,
various approaches both inside and outside the Marxist
tradition will be critically examined.

In the course of this analysis, certain aspects of
moral and political life are attended to which, it is
argued, have been neglected in modern thinking about these
themes. Particularly, questions will be raised concerning
the part played by moral character in politics and, in
relation to this, the ways in which the ethical dimension
to action in the world may be understood to be connected
in a meaningful way with the agent as a substantive moral
being. It is argued that a recognition of these features
of political ethics provides for a deeper account of the
issue of 'dirty hands' and, as a consequence, allows us to
draw a more fruitful picture of what is involved in political
activity. It is only in this theoretical context that the
relationship between political action and moral judgment
can in practice be regarded as a productive rather than an
ominously impotent one.

In view of the fact that we need to consider the
development of modern thinking concerning political ethics,
it is necessary to return initially to the claims and
positions which have to a great extent set the terms for
the modern debate. We must look to Machiavelli where we
find certain difficulties to do with acting in the modern
political context posed most starkly and controversially.

Notes

1. For a rather different approach, tied in more closely with the history of ideas, see J.Dunn (1979)

2. The use of literature in the context of a theoretical discussion is, of course, not uncontraversial. Clearly, the status of literary examples is not exactly equivalent to that of empirical ones. And equally, the character of literary treatments sits uneasily with philosophical argument. We might note two broad considerations here which serve to vitiate these difficulties. First, the role of examples in general is not a straightforward issue. The rejection of literature as a proper source of examples appears to suggest a sense in which their unreality undermines their role as _evidence_; but it is not clear that this is the only way in which examples might be used in arguments. Further even empirical examples will rarely be in any real sense conclusive. Examples may more frequently either fulfil an illustrative role in arguments or will serve to draw certain aspects of experience to our attention. In the light of this, a greater scope appears for literary examples: to the extent that literary cases may bring out aspects of experience which are compelling, puzzling or challenging, they may become relevant sources for the philosopher. Literary examples resist by nature the role of a 'paradigm' - but, as Tanner suggests, this may be an inappropriate way of characterising examples anyway. See M.Tanner (1964).

   The relevance of literature may also be approached on the more general level. Temptation, when encountering 'philosophical' or 'political' literature, to reduce it to a series of philosophical arguments or political claims appears to do scant justice to the literature (see George Orwell's treatment of Kipling, where he claims to be quoting Kipling "as politics and not as poetry" - G.Orwell, 1946 p.101. This would be justified if he were to regard Kipling's writing as artistically unconvincing, if he regarded Kipling as a charlatan;

but Orwell clearly does not take this view) The
consequent need to distinguish literature from
philosophical or political discourse may not, however,
invalidate the question of the bearing of one upon the
other. The fact that literature makes no direct
propositional claims concerning reality does not
necessarily render it uncompelling with respect to
one's view of the world. The 'closed' and non-referent-
ial character of literary discourse is precisely what
seems to render it compelling rather than simply a
subjective product. Good literature may reveal to us
aspects of the world which are not readily exposed by
literal referential language. It convinces us - albeit
in a manner which does not imply direct intervention.
And being 'convinced' here implies a demand or
compulsion that we should attend to what is being shown
to us. It is not the job of literature to 'sort things
out' in the way that philosophy might try to do; but to
the extent that it has the power to sensitize us to
experience, it presents a fruitful source of material
for theoretical reflection.

But does this suggest any sense in which literature has
advantages over empirical examples? Clearly, both can
fulfil the role described above; however, there is a
sense in which literature as a body of writing retains
a special value. We can come to know the character of
our experience by being able to give some account of it,
to be able to categorise and name it. There is a sense
in which to do this is to overcome its 'immediacy' (and
in some cases, its appearance of necessity) however,
this represents a process which carries its own dangers.
The attempt to represent reality in a manner which
affords it coherence and cognitive accessibility may
equally tend toward abstraction. In this context, the
'necessity' we might attach to unmediated experience may
be reproduced at a higher level in the form of a
theoretical reification.

The value of literature in this respect depends upon its
power of intervention. It intimates the character of

experience in a manner which eludes the grasp of
abstract accounts. The 'world' we encounter in
literature is one that we can regard from the vantage
point of the 'non-engaged' observer. But it nevertheless
compels us only when its world contains within it the
variegation, tension and dynamics of real experience.
In this sense, we might discover in literature a
presentation of aspects of human life which presses us
toward the recognition of features which more abstract
accounts may gloss over.

In the context of the present discussion, literature
may prove a useful fund of stories which place the
problem of political morality in its human context. To
the extent that a hard look at the issues of 'dirty
hands' prompts attention to questions of the way in which
agents relate to that problem via a consideration of
moral character, literature has a useful part to play.

Darkness at Noon presents the issue of politics and
morality in the shape of a moral individual whose
commitments draw him into specific sorts of relations
with others (and, ultimately, an uneasy relation with
his own moral identity). It therefore entails an
examination of the problem as it is borne by agents and
as it relates to a range of moral and political
commitments. If read simply as a critique of Marxism,
it may indeed be readily dismissed (see M.Merleau-Ponty
1969 ch.1). However, the power of the novel appears to
derive from something else. It evokes a particular
sort of human problem attaching to certain political
and moral contexts. Although it may entail indictments
of revolutionary theory and practice, it is an indictment
which emerges from the drama: Equally, the test of the
novel is not its 'historical accuracy' as such, but
rather the compelling nature of its own structure.

On the issue of literature and philosophy, see:
R.W.Beardsmore (1984); P.Johnson (1988) ch.8;
I.Murdock (1978); M.Nussbaum (1985).
On the political character of literature see:

P.Skagestad (1988); R.D.Spegele (1972); S.Zashin and
P.Chapman (1974)

3. A.Koestler (1970) p.143

4. ibid p.22

5. ibid p.101

6. ibid p.42

7. Approaches of this kind may, of course, generate
    problems of their own.
    Useful discussions of consequentialism include
    M.Slote (1985); A.Stubbs (1982); K.Neilson (1971) and
    R.W.Beardsmore (1969)

8. Questions of moral luck may become relevant here.
    Interesting treatments of this issue are provided by
    T.Nagel (1979) and B.Williams (1976)

9. A.Koestler (1970) p.54

10. ibid

11. ibid

12. ibid

13. ibid p.105

14. ibid p.150

15. This raises further questions which make themselves felt
    in Darkness at Noon. The relationship between verific-
    ation and guilt; the role of truth in the context of
    utility. These are increasingly called into question
    during Gletkin's interrogations. We will have cause
    to touch upon these issues later, but the moral
    character of Rubashov's experience and his self-
    understanding is what we are most interested in here.
    And this aspect speaks more generally in respect of
    the practice of politics.

16. ibid p.143

17. ibid p.243

18. ibid p.24

19. Parfit introduces an instructive example which draws our
    attention to the relationship between commitment and
    identity in a more general sense. A nineteenth century
    Russian socialist is heir to a large estate which he is
    determined to give away on inheritance. However,
    fearing that he may subsequently lose his ideals, he
    signs an undertaking to give away his inheritance and

places it in the hands of his wife. He then makes his
wife promise that if he does later demand that the
undertaking be ignored, she will refuse him; he will
no longer be the same man and she will therefore have
no good reason to break her original promise. (D.Parfit
1984 p.327)

This case seems to involve two different instances of
commitment. First, the commitment of the man to his
social ideals and second, that of the wife to her
husband. The manner in which these commitments find
expression in this case appears to render both somewhat
problematic. The actions of the husband prompts us to
ask precisely how real his moral commitment is for him;
and, from a more specific point of view, whether it can
adequately be articulated as a genuinely political
commitment (the relationship between moral ideals and
political commitments which may require a more
'situational' outlook will be discussed more fully later
on). In effect, he feels free to transfer the concrete
burden of that commitment on to his wife, mediated by
her promise to him. Thus understood, there are aspects
to this re-formulated commitment which reveal it to be
severely limited. As Parfit notes, the force of the
commitment is established through reference to radical
changes of identity such that any request on the part
of the husband that she should re-consider necessarily
render such a re-consideration illegitimate (ibid).
In this sense, a form of commitment is proffered which
is abstracted from experiential judgment and processes
of change. In more general terms, a problem can be
detected where moral commitments appear in a form which
transcends the substantive and temporal identity of the
agent. This appears to be one of the central difficult-
ies encountered by Rubashov who finds his commitments
problematic with respect to his own moral consciousness.
The possibility of a homogeneous moral identity is
correspondingly placed under threat.

20. Absolute Ethics, Mathematics and the Impossibility of
    Politics in R.Holland (1980)

21. ibid p.128

22. ibid

23. ibid p.137

24. ibid p.132

25. The significance of this claim is explored in the <u>Gorgias</u>

26. A.Koestler (1950) p.76

27. R.Holland (1980) p.136

28. cf. A.Stubbs (1982)

29. see P.Skagestad (1988) p.9

30. In this sense, also, the power of <u>Darkness at Noon</u>
    resides to a large extent in the apparently inscribed
    and intractable nature of the moral problem rather than
    in any proposed solutions as G.Rees suggests.
    see G.Rees (1975) p.122

31. R.Holland (1980) p.137

32. We can compare Rubashov's case with that of the porter
    Wassilij, whose sacrifice of conscience is less
    significant with respect to his <u>own</u> moral self-
    consciousness.

33. cf. B.Williams (1978) p.63

34. M.Walzer (1973) p.168

35. Other sorts of issues are considered in M.Walzer (1973);
    S.Hampshire (1978) and T.Nagel (1978)

II : Machiavellian Origins

In Darkness at Noon, Number One sleeps always with a
copy of The Prince at his bedside. We might want to say
that this is not unexpected: what better reference book
for a dictator than Machiavelli's concise and brilliant
manual of 'realpolitik'? But just as the political and
ethical implications of Koestler's novel prove far from
straightforward, similarly Machiavelli's political writings
invite more than this summary dismissal.

The reasons why Machiavelli's writings have cast a
shadow over almost all subsequent political thought are
multiple[1] but prominent amongst them is his approach to
political action in a moral context. Machiavelli is
concerned to show us what is required in order to act
politically; and in a world where we are forced to attend
to the "gulf between how one should live and how one does
live"[2], a world where the city is no longer adequately
characterized simply as an arena for the development and
expression of human good, one acts at the expense of moral
scruples. The prince, the supreme political agent, must
"learn how not to be virtuous".[3]

Machiavelli's awareness of the constant threat to the
life of the city posed by time and the attendant possibility
of corruption - of the loss of a civic culture and the
demise of institutions[4] - leads him to understand politics
not just as an arena of cultural life and expression but
often necessarily, one of acting with the future in mind.
In this context, political realism becomes an issue. We
must attend to things as they are and act on that basis.

> ...a man who neglects what is actually
> done for what should be done learns the
> way to self-destruction rather than
> self-preservation.[5]

The prince, it seems, must be prepared to employ any means
available to him if he is to preserve himself and secure
his position. In this sense, The Prince looks frequently
like a guide to pure expedience and power politics. But
this is clearly not the whole story.

Although Machiavelli is prepared to put all his
energies into demonstrating the ways in which a prince
may attain and secure absolute power, the allegience to
the prince is conditional and hence is in need of justification.
There is no absolute 'court of appeal' for judging political
actions in themselves, but we _are_ able to judge on the basis
of results. A prince may display considerable cruelty but
ultimately we cannot condemn him on these grounds alone.

> By making an example or two he will
> prove more compassionate than those
> who, being too compassionate, allow
> disorders which lead to murder and
> rapine.[6]

We must accept the severity of the prince, then, in so far
as he acts in the interests of the state.[7] The prince too
has some reference to a good available to him.

This is confirmed in the _Discourses_. The great founder
Romulus was prepared to kill his brother and to act with
great cruelty for the sake of the state he created.
Machiavelli comments that

> ...if such actions be justifiable,
> ambitious citizens who are eager to
> govern will follow and the example of
> their prince and use violence against
> those who are opposed to _their_
> authority. A view that will hold
> good provided we leave out of
> consideration the end which Romulus
> had in committing these murders.[8]

It must always be the end of the common good which serves
to sanction otherwise impermissible actions. The ends justify,
or perhaps more accurately excuse, the means.

Thus, Machiavelli is sensitive to the necessity of
distinguishing, on the basis of ends, between good and bad
'realpolitik'. But there is a further dimension here.
The Prince does not concern itself with formally conceived
political relationships and their moral ramifications. Rather,
we are dealing with the political _agent_ and Machiavelli spends
much time advising the prince on how he might protect himself,
deal with his opponents and get his way.

Machiavelli feels the need to go beyond the formal delineation of relationships and encourages us to reflect upon the practical and moral possibilities attendant upon the career of the political man where concepts such as risk, success and glory become relevant. To understand the significance of this practical dimension we need to remember that Machiavelli could not conceive of the political community independently of the problem of corruption.

The affairs of men in society are characterized by uncertainty. Fortune is an ever-present element in social action; and this involves more than simply odd contingencies and luck. Running deeper than this are shifting currents of events which can, at different times, help us or destroy us when we embark on particular courses of action.[9] They equally present dangers when we adopt particular static frameworks of social life and activity. In this context, the promise of an eternal community is a hollow one.

> It is impossible to constitute a republic
> that shall last forever since there are
> a thousand unpredictable ways in which its
> downfall may be brought about.[10]

And this intrinsic tendency to decay is grounded in the power of temporality and change, inherent in social life, to transcend the potential of static, determinate political structures. Fortune, then, becomes dominant over men, replacing the power they have over their own destiny (a power which in the first place can only be given to them as a body by a coherent civic culture). The result is corruption - the loss of faith in the civic body and a corresponding loss of collective meaning. Men become self-seeking and sceptical (but nevertheless ultimately slaves to fortune).

In such a context, extraordinary measures are called for:

> ...when it is corrupt, good legislation
> is of no avail unless it be initiated by
> someone in so extremely strong a position
> that he can enforce obedience until such
> time as the material has become good.[11]

And it is not just a matter of legislation:

> Normal methods will not suffice now that
> normal methods are bad. Hence it is
> necessary to resort to extraordinary
> methods such as force and an appeal to
> arms.[12]

When a political culture can no longer sustain itself, the
prince becomes a necessity. Political agency is possible
only when civic methods are transcended and a politically
astute prince puts himself in their place. In this sense,
it becomes clear that Machiavelli is prepared to recommend
princely politics (and to advise the prince on the ways in
which he might increase his own power) in so far as the
prince becomes himself the focus of political coherence in
the city.

> (because) men are by nature both
> ambitious and suspicious...the prince
> cannot but look to his own security.[13]

A corrupt society needs re-organisation and rapid action;
for this the prince must make himself the sole authority.[14]

There is a further aspect to the emergence of the
prince. The ends by reference to which political justifications
are established appear not simply as the preservation of the
state but equally the re-instatement of civic life in its
midst. The role of the prince is in part to provide the
possibility of re-claiming the resources which allow us
to cope with fortune. Machiavelli's ideal (albeit a
necessarily perishable one) is a virtuous city, one in which
civic commitment is present and institutions strong. And
further, during the course of the Discourses Machiavelli
leaves us in no doubt that the best form of life, where
civic virtue is strongest is a republic.[15] Far from advocating
tyranny, then, Machiavelli is concerned with what is necessary
for the maintenance of the political state in the light of
fortune and corruption and what is involved in the persistent
task of salvation.

This deeply dynamic aspect of Machiavelli's thinking
proves important for questions in political ethics. We are
led to consider that it means to act well in politics where
given social reference points are brought into doubt and what
burdens are placed upon those who so act.

> (one) must not flinch from being
> blamed for vices which are necessary
> for safeguarding the state.[16]

There is no doubt that there is a genuine burden involved in
the sense that moral scruples must be sacrificed: and although
the ends sanction the means, actions remain evil in themselves.

Even in reference to politics we must be aware of the moral
character of action and be prepared to regard them as repugnant.

> It behoves therefore every man to
> shun them and prefer rather to live
> as a private citizen than as a
> being with such ruination of men
> to his score.[17]

Even in his most thoroughly political passages, Machiavelli
does not let us forget the realm of moral judgment and therefore
reminds us that it is only under specific conditions and for
specific purposes that evil actions may be justified. In this
sense, politics cannot be said to leave morality behind
absolutely. Rather we have two modes of judgment that co-exist
and each in its way is morally compelling - at least, for one
who is involved in politics (a point to which we shall return
later).

Machiavelli places us, then, in a world where the
'impossibility of politics' is a luxury we can ill afford
and if we fail to recognize this, insisting upon the
implacability of moral demands in practice (an unworldliness
which, for Machiavelli, is just as damaging as self-interest)
then the burdens involved must be shouldered for us by the
prince.

Machiavelli's tough approach to the issue of political
ethics, often regarded as straightforward (and correspondingly
repugnant) raises important questions; questions which other
approaches less sensitive to the problem of 'dirty hands'
necessarily fail to raise in their full depth. Once we
accept the claims of political duty we come to the question of
whether there is any foundation for imposing limits upon what
can be tolerated in the name of good political ends. We can
also ask whether we can supply clear criteria for identifying
what is to count as a genuine case of 'dirty hands' as
opposed to simple political malpractice.

This second question might appear curious in the light of
what we have already said concerning political ends; whereas
the first question clearly remains open. However, when we
start to examine what can be said concerning qualititive
limits to political action in the Machiavellian context,
difficulties emerge which ultimately may lead us to doubt the
possibility of a clear delineation of the problem in general.

There is a chapter in The Prince devoted to an account
of what a prince must do in order to win honour.[18]This
involves securing the loyalty and affection of the people,
acting so as to keep the state secure, encouraging citizens
to be industrious and prosperous and engaging in large and
impressive projects. Throughout, however, we get the sense
of the extent to which the prince cannot afford to identify
himself completely with these virtuous practices: He must
be generous but his 'displays' of generosity must be carefully
planned.[19] Sponteneity in these matters is irresponsible. The
wise prince is always one step back from being fully virtuous
and must be prepared to turn his hand to "a pious work of
cruelty".[20] Clearly circumstances will dictate the extent
to which cruelty and deception are called for and when
fortune brings conditions of extreme uncertainty, the normal
limits which are imposed upon a prince, or which he might
impose upon himself, are to be swiftly and unceremoniously
broken.

To see whether there might be any sense in which there
is a limit to the evil a good ruler might employ, it is
useful to compare two examples Machiavelli gives us of
princely action. He contrasts those princes who win power
and glory through prowess[21]with those who come to power by
criminal action. Here he cites the case of Agathocles who
rose to become king of Syracuse, displaying courage and
audacity but acting consistently in a criminal manner
culminating in a conspiracy involving the murder of all
the senators and richest citizens of Syracuse. Machiavelli
sums up the career of Agathocles as follows:

> ...that was how he won his principality,
> and he maintained his position with
> many audacious and dangerous enterprises.
> Yet it cannot be called prowess to kill
> fellow citizens, to betray friends, to
> be treacherous, pitiless, irreligious.
> These ways can win a prince power but
> not glory.[22]

These remarks reveal a certain significant ambiguity in
Machiavelli's assessment of Agathocles which proves instructive
for his understanding of 'dirty hands' problems.

Clearly, Machiavelli does not endorse the actions of
Agathocles: but the admiration both for his courage and

tenacity and for the fact that Agathocles was able to secure his rule, to establish an enduring kingdom, is evident. The fact that Agathocles was outstandingly successful counts for a good deal.

In fact, there appear to be three available modes of judgment in operation. First in respect of ends, second a judgment upon the qualitative character of action and third on the basis of success or failure. We can safely assume that Machiavelli considered the ends of Agathocles' actions to have no genuine power of justification. When introducing the example Machiavelli states that he will not consider the rights and wrongs of the matter.[23] But there are two aspects to the case which indicate that Machiavelli could not approve fully of Agathocles. First, he acted so as to convert a republic into a tyranny and second, he acted out of a desire for personal power. In the Discourses, Machiavelli makes it clear that tyrannical methods are always a force for corruption and therefore for evil. He cites the example of Tarquin the Proud who murdered his king and claimed absolute power for himself. Machiavelli notes that,

> ...this way of obtaining a kingdom
> is abnormal and odious...[24]

Equally, and related to this, he displays a contempt for ambition. It is ambition which leads men to destroy political communities and

> ...cancels out virtues of mind and
> body and services rendered to one's
> country.[25]

Thus, Agathocles must be accounted a force for evil rather than for good and, as such, has no excuse for what he did.

In addition to this, however, we might find reason to think that it is more than simply the intentions behind the action of Agathocles that prove morally unacceptable. Machiavelli suggests that betrayal and murder do not indicate prowess: they may have won Agathocles power but they cannot bring him glory. The implication seems to be that such actions are intrinsically unacceptable. Now, as we have seen,

Machiavelli is keen to emphasise that 'normal' moral
standards cannot be applied in politics; one may have to
act badly in order to act well. But his comments here
seem to indicate that there may nevertheless be intrinsic
limits to what is tolerable in any context. To be a
virtuous ruler - which is, for Machiavelli, equivalent to
possessing the power to win glory - one cannot be too
scrupulous, but to be too _unscrupulous_ is equally to
sacrifice the possibility of glory, to place oneself
outside the limits even of that moral assessment peculiar
to politics.

Before we can draw any conclusions here, we need to
compare this example with other of Machiavelli's remarks.
In contrast with Agathocles, he cites the case of Cesare
Borgia, an individual of considerable prowess and consequently
deserving of glory. But Cesare Borgia's career appears no
less morally problematic than that of Agathocles. He was
prepared to betray his trusting opponents and to use his
ministers as scapegoats for his own cruelties.[26] The only
censure Machiavelli reserves for Cesare Borgia is concerning
his decision to install Pope Julius - a purely instrumental
consideration.[27]

In addition to this, the _Discourses_ provide us with a
number of examples of rulers who win praise for actions at
least as disturbing as those of Agathocles. Cleomenes, king
of Sparta, had all the ephors murdered and proceeded to wipe
out any possible sources of political opposition. But, says
Machiavelli

> ...by doing so he gave fresh
> life to Sparta.[28]

In the light of this, his actions must be regarded as
justified and, moreover, as glorious. In the same vein,
we find the example of Brutus who was prepared to condemn
his own sons as potential sources of opposition and de-
stabilization of the state and to preside over their
execution. Machiavelli not only approves of Brutus' actions
but finds in them the basis of a general maxim for anyone who
wishes to found a 'free state'[29]

These examples are clearly sufficient to cast doubt
on the assumption that Machiavelli operates with a clear
intrinsic standard of judgment in politics. In consequence,
it becomes more difficult to find a basis for any discernible
moral limits within the 'dirty hands' problem.

This gains confirmation from Machiavelli's later
comments in the Discourses.

> ...In order to obtain glory, a man
> must use different methods in a
> city that is corrupt from what he
> would use in one in which political
> life is still vigorous.[30]

The relationship between glory and some intrinsic standard
of judgment applied to actions therefore appears to be
ruled out. The truly glorious prince will risk an ignominious
reputation for the sake of the city.

An alternative way in which we might distinguish between
glorious action on the part of the ruler from that which is
"odious" (the distinction which seems to be implied in the
Agathocles example) is by reference to law. Machiavelli
attributes considerable importance to the role of law in a
state.

> I do not think a worse example can
> be set in a republic than to make
> a law and not to observe it.[31]

And principalities as much as republics require a legalistic
foundation for social action.[32]

This is also the basis for Machiavelli's important
distinction between dictatorship and tyranny.[33] The Roman
state was wise to provide for the possibility of dictatorial
authority in difficult times. Such power was acceptable,

> ...as long as it was bestowed in
> accordance with public institutions
> and not assumed by the dictator on
> his own authority.[34]

In this sense, the legitimacy of the dictator is given in
so far as the basis of his power is constitutionally grounded.
Unlike a tyrant, then, the Roman dictator was a respecter of
law; and it is their lack of respect for law which makes
tyrants corruptors of the populace as a whole.

Thus, acting within a legalistic framework seems, for
Machiavelli, to confer a legitimacy upon a prince. But,
again, this does not furnish us with an adequate basis for
the distinction between what is glorious and what is not.
In a healthy state, a legal criterion may suffice as a way
of assessing a good ruler but Machiavelli makes it clear
that we cannot rest content with the assumption of health.
This is a sure route to destruction at the hands of fortune.
The demands involved in facing up to innovation are severe
and should never be forgotten.

As a result, whether a legalistic criterion carries
any force with respect to judgment will depend upon the
prevailing circumstances. It clearly could have no application
in the case of the great founders who had to work on essentially
formless social material.[35] And equally, to the extent that a
city grows corrupt, its laws will proportionately lose their
meaning.

> ...just as for the maintenance of
> good customs, laws are required, so
> if laws are to be observed, there is
> need of good customs.[36]

Where the city has lost its civic standards and the meanings
which such standards generate, a process of re-construction
is required. In such cases, a ruler

> ...should contrive to be alone in
> his authority. Nor will any reasonable
> man blame him for taking any action
> however extraordinary which may be of
> service in the organizing of a kingdom
> or the constituting of a republic.[37]

When the choice is "..either to stand by the constitution
and be ruined or violate it and not be ruined"[38]there is
no doubting what the good political agent should do. And
for Machiavelli there can be nothing more glorious than to
do what is required for the re-construction of a corrupted
city (or equally, to save a city from imminent corruption).
Legality, then, cannot determine glory.

In the light of this, the concept of glory appears to
lose its force as an immediate standard. In so far as it
remains a limit it must be an external one. As Leonard

suggests, glory becomes a way of recognising genuine
public action as opposed to the misuse of authority or
of the public arena in general.[39] Two significant considerations
follow here to which we will have cause to return. First, this
dimension to the notion of glory returns us to the realm of
ends. And second, given that glory involves notions of public
recognition and memory, it prompts us to entertain the
importance of appearances.

What we can say at this point is that on the Machiavellian
account, there can be no internal qualitative limits to the
range over which political justifications, constitutive of
the problem of 'dirty hands', can find application. In so
far as he acts for the common good rather than out of personal
ambition, anything can be held to be excusable. In this sense,
we must conclude that Machiavelli's reluctance to attribute
glory to Agathocles can only ultimately rest upon the question
of the ends to which his action was directed.[40]

However, we have not yet exhausted the implications of
the example. As we noted earlier, Agathocles does gain praise
for his success; and not simply his success as a usurper but
also in so far as his subsequent rule was secure and impressive.
Machiavelli's treatment of princely action shows us the extent
to which success is something which can be characterised and
analysed independently of moral questions. He is able to
discuss what is required for a prince to succeed and to
demonstrate impressive practical capabilities without talking
of the rights and wrongs of the matter. The rights and wrongs
become relevant only in terms of the ends which the prince has
in view.

Machiavelli does note that Agathocles' ultimate success
is somewhat surprising; exceptionally cruel and ambitious
princes rarely last very long and Agathocles was able to do
so only because he subsequently "used his cruelty well".[41]
It remains the case, however, that someone like Agathocles
was able to institute something useful and lasting.[42]

However, in certain circumstances, the issue ceases to
be quite so clear. Re-calling the example of Tarquin the
Proud, we find what is apparently a case of a bad political
actor (one who is bent upon personal power rather than the
good of the city) who ultimately benefits his city and brings
it both prosperity and a renewed civic life. The case of
Agathocles appears to lend further weight to this problematic
possibility; that bad intentions may produce social good.
The fact that results do not bear any immediate relation to
the moral quality of one's intentions presents a difficulty
when it comes to establishing concrete criteria concerning
the socially effective prince.

As we have noted, there may, for Machiavelli, be some
relation between intentions and outcomes in so far as the
evil prince will find it difficult to maintain himself.
In order to establish a lasting rule some basis must be
generated in the wider community. In terms of endurance,
the possibility of the prince as a lone actor must be limited.
Introducing a secure foundation in terms of the institutional
and social life of a community is precisely the fence at
which the cruel and ambitious prince will be likely to fall.
But the issue here is far from black and white. Certainly
a people that has become corrupt and self-interested will
fall victim to fortune, will lose their civic strength; but
in the case of the prince things are less clear.

To put this in other terms, we might have reason to
identify a positive dimension attaching to ambition, which
is normally to be regarded as the primary origin of political
evil. In times of great uncertainty and corruption, the
position which the ruler must necessarily come to occupy
complicates the case. We must remember that he needs to
constitute himself as the sole authority. Those institutions
and practices which normally make social life intelligible
and carry the possibility of the common good have degenerated
and, thus, the common good becomes identified with the prince
himself.

This suggests a problem which turns upon the distinction between ends in view and actual results - between intentions and outcomes. One of the most urgent lessons Machiavelli offers us is that morally good intentions do not necessarily produce good results (and in some circumstances will guarantee disaster). Equally, evil intentions on the part of the prince will generally do harm to the city.

This is the foundation for Machiavelli's claim that the prince must know how to be both good and evil. The claim of the common good, of the welfare of the city transcends the particular moral intentions of the agent. It is a crucially public demand which escapes the terrain both of individual scruples and individual (i.e. self-interested) evil. The good of the city demands results and to adopt this as one's end in view is to abandon intentions as a moral criterion. One's intention must be to secure the common good and this implies nothing about the immediate moral character of one's intentional actions.

We may, however, derive from this certain guidelines or requirements applicable to a good ruler.

> He should appear to be compassionate,
> faithful to his word, kind, guileless,
> and devout. And indeed he should be so.
> But his disposition should be such that,
> if he needs to be the opposite, he knows
> how...he should have a flexible
> disposition, varying as fortune and
> circumstances dictate...he should not
> deviate from what is good, if that is
> possible, but he should know how to do
> evil, if that is necessary.[43]

This does seem to tell us something of the general moral disposition of the prince. He should be a morally scrupulous individual who is nevertheless prepared to be bad when called upon so to be. The moral landscape prior to the introduction of ends which carry a justifying power is not barren; and a prince who acts in an evil way must be aware of what he is doing and that the extent to which he may be excused remains contingent. In this sense, princely politics does not seem to be cast entirely adrift from the general moral intentions of the agent. We want good men who know how to be evil.

We can best investigate this issue by looking further at the character of the prince. Machiavelli emphasises the extent to which effective political action, action in an arena fraught with uncertainty and conflict, requires considerable vision. The greatest political actors have been the great founders Moses, Cyrus, Romulus and Theseus; but Moses stands out as a 'special case' because he "...merely executed what God commanded..."[44] Thus Moses had the inexhaustable vision of God at his disposal. However, the actions of the other great founders reveal a considerable similarity to those of Moses. In this sense, their princely vision and capability made it possible to approach the divine, to defeat fortune which is the constant enemy of finite mortals.[45] The more serious the situation, the more we expect from the prince and the more we expect him to be capable of.

The correlate of this is that the prince can demand much of us. The bounds of legitimacy become, therefore, increasingly difficult to specify. In the light of this, we face a severe difficulty when it comes to placing limits upon what is to count as a genuine case of 'dirty hands'. The image of the prince is a considerable one: the individual who as an individual can nevertheless come to embody the collective vision and possibility we could normally divine only in a coherent community. In the face of an image of this sort, where an exceptional individual is able to replace the entire political life of the city, distinctions between ambition and glory, between personal ends and public ends begin to blur.[46]

Thus, an analysis of Machiavelli's account constantly raises questions concerning the relationship between public and private life and reveals the extent to which this relationship proves crucial to political morality. We have seen how serious political action demands the transcendence of moral scruples. And it seems that if we wish to live a genuine moral existence we must refrain from politics - it behoves every decent man to live as a private citizen.

Moral goodness, then, belongs to the sphere of _private_
life; and so does moral evil. Neither are appropriate
to political agency. The prince must know how to be both
wholly good and wholly bad - but cannot afford properly to
be either.[47]

    With this image of the prince, the ultimate political
agent, we have the portrait of the wholly public man. He
gives himself wholly over to his roles, being whatever he
is required to be. In this sense the character of the prince
is a troublesome one. It is desirable that the prince should
be a religious man[48] but at the same time it is absolutely
necessary that he should retain only the _appearance_ of
religion:

> ...the rulers of a republic or of a
> kingdom...should uphold the basic
> principles of the religion which they
> practice in...They should also further
> and encourage everything likely to be
> of help to this and even though they
> be convinced that it is quite fallacious.[49]

The paradox deeply ingrained in the character of the prince
can be stated thus: how is it possible to _be_ devout and
yet at the same time place oneself in a position with respect
to religious practice such that it becomes a mere instrument -
that the necessity of religion presents itself at the same time
as a purely instrumental necessity?

    The prince, as public man, becomes an abstraction from
the community where private citizens live. The problems
entailed by this become most severe when the prince becomes
increasingly identified with the political life of the
community as a whole. What counts as acting in the best
interests of the community, the furtherance of public ends,
is ominously extendable.

    If the prince increasingly becomes the focus for the
concentration of public consciousness and action, the correlate
of this is the draining away of public life from the community
as a whole. This is precisely what it means for a populace
to become corrupt in its civic life. As Shumer notes, this
sort of 'withdrawl'

> ...entails the deliberate refusal to
> seek for the universal or general, and
> it is to reject even the attempt to
> distinguish between subjective
> private desire and a collectively
> determined public good.[50]

The figure of the prince emerges where a recognition on the part of the body politic of a public, political dimension to life is lost. This must equally entail a loss of judgment as well as of civic capability. In this sense, the possibility of reserving judgment upon the prince is eroded. In the context of an entirely de-politicized citizenry, political possibilities accrue only to the prince and judgments concerning ends which would serve to distinguish good from bad political action cease to be available.[51]

It is significant that Machiavelli felt himself able to write a detailed account of the mechanics of princely action abstracted from the wider treatment of political life we encounter in the Discourses. But this does not mean that the pre-occupations of the two works can strictly be isolated from one another. The difficulties and demands involved in political action in the face of fortune cannot be ignored and remain an element in all political communities. Nevertheless these are themes which Machiavelli considers command our attention in and of themselves; and the fact that tensions exist between the image of the prince and that of the republic is indicative of a severe problem which attaches to political action in general, in all contexts.

We might follow Jacobson in regarding The Prince as a work of fiction, as providing us with

> ...Machiavelli's superb artistic
> creation, the Prince.[52]

We might wish to regard Machiavelli, especially the Machiavelli of The Prince as a political playwright, presenting us with a dramatic construction. We can lend this interpretation some credence considering what we have seen of the character of the prince and the problems generated by the attribution of this character to a moral individual. However, this does not diminish the point (and in fact may serve to re-emphasise it).

In The Prince, we find a superlative model of political agency: if the prince is a fiction, he is no less of a problem, and indeed may indicate a deeper difficulty in so far as he comes to represent the _form_ of a political problem.

As we have seen, Machiavelli takes the idea of morality seriously and it takes a certain sort of moral duty or social ethics to override individual moral pre-occupations. Nevertheless we remain in a position where the glance in the direction of immediate ethical considerations appears to be an increasingly cursory one. This manifests itself in two ways. First, although the moral considerations appertaining to an individual (moral) being always remain - one serves the city at the expense of one's _soul_ [53]- and thus, 'dirty hands' problems are most definitely on the agenda, there appears to be no point at which such demands have a concrete force, i.e. where moral claims override the commitments of the genuine political agent. Second, when the princely image takes its place as the image of political authority in an epoch of corruption, the distinction by reference to ends, the distinction between 'dirty hands' and the practice of evil in politics, loses its vital force.[54]

These two problematic dimensions to the Machiavellian legacy both bear a significant relation to the issue of public and private life in a political community; and, most especially, in a community which can never hope to be eternal. It is not only in the rarified atmosphere of the ascendence of the prince that the lessons of The Prince prove relevant. The problems of which the prince is in a certain sense a personification reproduce themselves equally in a republic. Machiavelli is willing to stake a great deal on what can be achieved in a healthy republic, where

> ...all its citizens alike in their
> private and official capacity, have
> a chance to put alike their virtue
> and the power of fortune to the test

> of experience, it will be found that
> always and in all circumstances they
> will maintain their dignity in the
> same way.[55]

In a political culture which displays this level of vitality
and virtue, problems of political ethics may fade from the
scene. A good republic is characterised by an enthusiastic
adherence to the law, belief and participation in institutions
and religious commitment. Under these conditions, the threat
to the life of a state posed by fortune, by the impetus toward
disintegration, may be allayed. But it nevertheless always
remains as a threat - and just as a wise republic always
retains the possibility of dictatorship (see above) the issue
of 'dirty hands' cannot be put aside.

Divisive conflict or insecurity is implicit in any
political society and it requires firm handling.

> ...whenever men individually or a
> whole city offends against a state,
> its ruler has both as an example to
> others and for its own security, no
> alternative but to wipe them out.[56]

This is an imperative in any state, and even the best of
republics may, at some stage, have to face up to it. To
the extent that it figures as an intrinsic dimension of
political life, the preparedness to manifest brutality
where necessary becomes itself a condition of a good
republic. In the case of a threat to the state those
concerned must be eliminated and

> ...in executions of this kind, there
> is something great and grand, a weak
> republic cannot do such things.[57]

The mark of the strong community is its capacity for
"unwonted severity"[58] and this is something which cannot
be contained within the republican framework of legal
sanctions and prohibitions, no matter how firmly grounded
such a framework is. It is, of course, undesirable that
this point should be reached: quite clearly the constitution
must be sacrificed and this serves to set a worrying
precedent.

> ...it sanctions the usage of dispensing
> with constitutional methods for a good
> purpose, and thereby makes it possible,
> on some plausible pretext, to dispense
> with them for a bad purpose.[59]

The lessons of The Prince present themselves forcibly to the rulers of republics.

With these lessons too come the difficulties we have identified. At the end of the Discourses Machiavelli emphasises the lengths to which it may be necessary to go in order to safeguard a republic.

> Rome did not hesitate to pronounce
> judicial sentence of death on a whole
> legion at a time, or on a city; nor
> yet to banish eight or ten thousand men
> and to impose on them extraordinary
> conditions.[60]

We also find Machiavelli giving his approval to an early example of bureaucratic terror in the form of the Roman practice of decimation.[61]

Machiavelli's ideal, the vibrant republic, which appears to figure in one sense or another in the end of all good political agency, is not one which provides a genuine resolution to the problems thrown up by action in the context of political decline or turmoil. As we have noted, in the princely arena, political life, public action, takes on a form such that it is peculiarly detached from the life of an individual. The prince is a public man whose 'modus vivendi' stands in contrast with that of any ordinary citizen. This is the essence of politics and is as present in the life of the republic as it is in that of the prince.

This is not to say that there is no difference between the two. In the case of a republic, the populace, or some proportion of it, emerges on to the political stage. The public life of the community finds its home in the image of the state rather than that of the prince. But this may constitute the transformation of problems rather than their disappearance.

In the republic, the chasm between public action and individual (moral) life may not always make itself apparent. And indeed this appears precisely to be the grounds for Machiavelli's upholding the republic as an ideal. Where the citizen identifies himself at least in part through public life,

where institutions prove not simply a guide for conduct but a foundation for identity and for practical judgment, political questions may manifest themselves in a way which is considerably less problematic from a moral point of view. Where concern for public life on the part of the citizenry is an integral one, public issues and pursuits are not understood as merely subsequent to the reality of private life, but as intrinsic to self-identifications. This may correspondingly reduce the prominence of situations where 'dirty hands' problems arise.

Just as corruption represents the 'withdrawl' of the individual from public life and therefore equally the distancing of the moral life of persons from the moral imperatives given by the public interest, so in the same way the politics of uncertainty, of extraordinary times, becomes transcendent of moral considerations. With the image of the ideal republic in our minds, we might be tempted to think of this conflict as one which is confined to limiting cases. But Machiavelli's most potent message is precisely that this way of thinking represents a complacency which is potentially catastrophic. Those who wish to be successful in politics do not wait for disasters to happen or dangers to emerge before they are prompted to act. In this sense, the reserve with which political judgment must regard ethics is a constant feature of public life.

There is a further point here concerning ends. A single basic model of instrumental action, doing x in order to achieve y, where y is a direct and immediate consequence of x, will not account for all the practical necessities involved. One may do x for the sake of y where y is a non-immediate consequence; where the ends in view are further consequences of y; where y is a state of affairs valued in terms of the fact that it makes further agency possible; where y is a negative (i.e. the prevention of some alternative, undesirable state of affairs of event). These last two cases are significant in terms of the sorts of political demands which may be recognised in any state at any time.

We might want to say that normal political life in a
republic will, to the extent that it does generate 'dirty
hands' problems, generate clearly definable ones. The
problem resulting from the image of the prince as the sole
repository of virtue and political possibility are clearly
not absolutely reproduced in a republic. But there is still
a difficulty: the interests of the republican state may
equally be distinguished from the particular lives of its
people. Acting in order to make further agency possible
or in order to prevent, or forestall, possible dangers
bring these difficulties to the forefront.[62] In both cases,
action is directed toward an end which is not necessarily
immediate or positively discernible. Further, inherent in
such cases is the possibility both of preservation of power
(or of those in power) for its own sake and of the institution-
alisation of instrumental political policy.

Pre-occupation with long-term ends and policies of
prevention rather than of cure may imply modes of political
action which are more permanent and bureaucratic than that
which is characterised by the singular 'great and grand'
deeds of the princely ruler. We might recall here as well
that politics involves a concern with appearances and
appearances characteristically need to be 'kept up'.

We need to be aware of the manner in which the
interests of a political leadership may become identified
directly with the general good. And in this sense, the
distinction between political action for the social good
(which is the condition of real 'dirty hands' problems)
and simple power politics becomes more difficult to draw.

In general terms, Machiavelli's account provides us
with a forceful picture of the central place occupied by
problems of 'dirty hands' in the arena of politics when it
is subjected to moral interrogation. At the same time,
in the course of an analysis of this account, we encounter
fundamental difficulties endemic in the Machiavellian
approach.

It is understandably rare, as Machiavelli admits,
that we will find a truly virtuous prince. For the most
part, the prince stands necessarily at odds with the community.

> What he does in his own interests
> usually harms the city, and what is
> done in the interests of the city
> harms him.[63]

The elusiveness of the genuinely great prince is significant.
This rarity is not contingent and reflects a deeper
difficulty to which Machiavelli demonstrates some sensitivity.

> ...to reconstitute political life
> in a state presupposes a good man,
> whereas to have recourse to violence
> in order to make oneself prince in
> a republic supposes a bad man.
> Hence very rarely will these be
> found a good man ready to use bad
> methods in order to make himself
> prince, though with a good end in
> view, nor yet a bad man who, having
> become a prince, is ready to do the
> right thing and to whose mind it will
> occur to use well that authority
> which he has acquired by bad means.[64]

In its starkest form, the project of political reconstruction
appears as "either a most brutal or an impossible
undertaking".[65] At this extreme (which nevertheless has the
character of an extrapolation) of action and judgment, the
unity which characterises the prince - the unity of moral
consciousness and political commitment appears a tenuous
one. This lies behind both the exceptional character of
the good prince and, more generally, the problematic nature
of political ethics.

For the prince to be effective, as an image, we must
have a certain sort of faith in him; but such faith may
equally blind us to the moral limits which serve to define
his authenticity. Further, the possible lack of reality
attendant upon the image suggests the manner in which all
immediate moral considerations might fall away. We are left
with a strong sense of the problem itself as one which proves
hard to keep in clear view when thinking about political
agency. That moral judgment betrays its limits when weighed
against political commitment leaves us with the difficult
task of assigning a place to such judgment at all. This makes
itself apparent in terms of the role of morality both
internally and externally in relation to political necessity.

These two dimensions are apparently independent of
one another. The fact that no intrinsic moral limits seem
applicable to political action for the common good implies
nothing in itself concerning the fragility of the ends
concerned. But we _can_ relate this latter problem to a more
general political condition. It is when the general good
(in itself a possibly obscure notion) becomes identified
with the interests of a ruler or a regime that this sort
of difficulty emerges.[66]

Of course, certain sorts of external limits (limits to
the problem as a whole) may remain clear. Using political
power in order to line one's own pockets or to give jobs
to one's relatives appears morally impermissible on the
Machiavellian account. However, within these limits, there
is still room for obscurity. This becomes evident in the
light of what we have said concerning the nature of princely
power and the possibility of that power becoming its own
justification.[67] In general, it is clear that when the
pressure of fortune (of which Machiavelli is so acutely
aware) is placed upon the city, the difficulties resulting
from the increasing publicness of politics and the privacy
of moral being become severe.

Machiavelli is in a sense a theorist of tensions:
he is sensitive to the problematic and productive nature
of the tensions which become apparent when we analyse the
dynamics of social and political life.[68] His account gives
value in part due to the fact that he is reluctant to adopt
a theoretical perspective which would demand the resolution
of such tensions through the abolition of one or other of
the terms involved. In this sense, as we have seen, a study
of the Machiavellian approach pays dividends not in terms of
theoretical answers but rather in terms of the recognition
of certain sorts of problems which resist responses of this
kind. The implications of such a recognition and the
difficulties which result from it form a problematic which is
foundational with respect to subsequent debates over, and
responses to, the issue of political ethics.

Through an analysis and assessment of Machiavelli, we
have been able to identify a range of issues involved in

political agency which surround the central question of
'dirty hands'. Questions emerge concerning the possibility
of specifying limits, both internal to the problem and
externally in respect of its range of application. These
questions reveal themselves to be related to other dimensions
of political action.

Chiefly, these include problems concerning ends and
the variety of possible relationships between ends and
means. In the light of Machiavelli's observations, the
possibility of retaining an ethical judgment upon actions
which gain their meaning and their rationale by reference
to ends becomes a difficulty; and further, questions emerge
concerning the complex relations between legitimacy and
success. For Machiavelli, the emphasis must always be
upon action - it is better to act and repent than to shrink
from action. Failure in this context is an essential risk.
In what sense this risk might be a _moral_ one is an issue which
lies implicit in the Machiavellian picture and one which takes
on increasing importance in modern political contexts.

As the representative of a broadly 'pre-ideological' era,
Machiavelli presents us with issues which become transformed
with the introduction of modern perspectives, of references to
social ideals and theories of obligation which have deep
consequences for understandings both of political change and
of the legitimacy of political power.

In order to fill out properly the intellectual context
within which modern approaches to political ethics have emerged,
we need to examine these transformations and their implications.
However, it is something which is best done in a manner
sensitive to the Machiavellian origins. And this is so not
simply because these origins provide a useful background to
modern depates but also because, in the wake of Machiavelli's
supremely honest account, we are able to gain a sense of the
way in which subsequent approaches bring with them new
perspectives and a degree of refinement, but may also serve
to close off certain avenues.

Notes

1. See J.G.A.Pocock (1972)
2. Machiavelli (1961) p.91
3. ibid
4. For a fuller account of the concept of corruption in Machiavelli see S.M.Shumer (1979) and H. Mansfield (1979)
5. Machiavelli (1970) p.91
6. ibid p.98
7. We must remember here that a moral acceptance of the prince cannot be resolved into questions of rights: a concept entirely alien to Machiavelli. Rather, it can only be understood as a judgment upon the agent.
8. Machiavelli (1970) p.132
9. An interesting analysis of fortune and its relation with temporality is given by J.Orr (1972). See also H. Pitkin (1984)
10. Machiavelli (1970) p.132
11. ibid p.159
12. ibid p.163
13. ibid p.187
14. ibid p.134
15. ibid p.256
16. Machiavelli (1961) p.92
17. Machiavelli (1970) p.177
18. Machiavelli (1961) ch.XXI
19. ibid p.124
20. ibid p.120
21. I have followed G.Bull - see Machiavelli (1961) - in using prowess' here in place of 'virtu' since the latter is used in a number of different contexts where its meaning alters. For a comprehensive analysis of the uses of 'virtu' in Machiavelli see N.Wood (1967).
22. Machiavelli (1961) p.63
23. ibid p.61
24. Machiavelli (1970) p.395
25. see R.Price (1982)
26. Machiavelli (1961) p.57
27. ibid p.61
28. Machiavelli (1970) p.134
29. ibid p.393
30. ibid p.428

31. ibid p.220

32. ibid p.256

33. Mansfield notes the sense in which this distinction
    becomes harder to maintain the further we take the
    Machiavellian approach. See H.Mansfield (1979) p.115

34. Machiavelli (1970) p.194

35. Machiavelli (1961) p.50

36. Machiavelli (1970) p.160

37. ibid p.132

38. ibid p.195

39. J.Leonard (1984) p.494

40. Thus, to the extent that Machiavelli, via the concept
    of 'virtue', appears to be posing an alternative set of
    martial values against those of moral principle, there
    remains a problem in so far as no intrinsic standard
    of judgment guarantees results. T.Ball (1984) argues
    that Machiavelli is attempting to resurrect a former
    ethic - one akin to the homeric concept of heroic
    virtue - a project which is necessarily doomed, lacking
    as it does an historical view of moral change. However
    this might involve a slight underestimation of
    Machiavelli's modernity. He is undoubtedly deeply
    aware of the problems associated with finitude and
    decay and this gives his thought a sophistication which
    contrasts with the idea of a straightforward ethical
    'resurrection'. It is instructive here that Machiavelli
    chooses to transform the dramatic motif of social action
    from a tragic to a comic one. See M.J.Flaumenhaft (1978).

41. Machiavelli (1961) p.61

42. Success is certainly not all for Machiavelli: Cesare
    Borgia ultimately failed, but did so gloriously and
    only, in the end, due to the "extraordinary malice of
    fortune" (ibid p.55). Nevertheless, the question of
    success, in the light of the entirely unpredictable
    and capricious nature of fortune, does present a
    significant problem.

43. ibid p.100

44. ibid p.50

45. One symptom of corruption is the demise of religious
    adherence and there is a sense in which the image of
    the prince, echoing that of foundation, seems to serve
    as a focal point for renewing self-transcending
    adherences.

46. This problem is emphasised by M.Hulliung (1983) who
    notes the sense in which Machiavelli tends to make
    necessity the servant of greatness. In this sense,
    much modern emphasis upon Machiavelli's 'humanism'
    is exaggerated. Equally, it cannot be doubted that
    moral judgments do constitute a problem in Machiavelli's
    thought.

47. Pocock (1972) suggests that the prince must live in a
    'time sequence' where he successively adopts appropriate
    personae. Although we can see this as, in a certain
    sense, re-emphasising the problems involved in assigning
    a genuine character to the prince.

48. Machiavelli (1961) p.100

49. Machiavelli (1970) p.143

50. S.M.Shumer (1979) p.11

51. Again, this is not a matter of a loss of political rights
    effective against a ruler (see note 7) but rather is a
    sympton of a disengagement from political life.

52. N. Jacobson (1978) p.27

53. Jacobson notes, following Arendt, that this, in the
    Machiavellian context, is a more fearsome and less
    metaphorical description than it might appear to the
    modern reader. ibid

54. Again, this lends credence to Hulliung's interpretation
    of Machiavelli (see note 46) as a proponent of power
    politics. Although his undoubted republican commitments
    indicate that the vestiges of a deep problem remain.

55. Machiavelli (1970) p.492

56. ibid p.369

57. ibid p.479

58. ibid p.387

59. ibid p.195

60. ibid p.527

61. ibid

62. Machiavelli frequently appears to use military policy
     as a model for political life. cf. N.Wood (1967) p.170

63. Machiavelli (1970) p.275

64. ibid p.164

65. ibid

66. In a healthy republic, this sort of identification may
     appear unproblematic - indeed it may be essential to
     the idea of the genuine republic that this is so - but
     the healthy republic is from this point of view a
     limiting concept and really hard cases in respect of
     political ethics arise in the context of innovation,
     where, at worst, the republic exists in name only.

67. In princely politics, there is always a sense of
     personal motive. The good prince does not just receive
     glory but is a seeker after glory; in this sense, he is
     ambitious and self-orientated. This aspect to political
     power brings the possibility of its insatiability
     somewhat closer. cf. Hulliung (1983).

68. This theme is stressed by S.M.Shumer (1979) and by
     B.Crick in Machiavelli (1970).

III: Kant and the Liberal Response

> Nothing is more reprehensible than
> to derive the laws prescribing what
> ought to be done from what is done
> or to impose upon them the limits
> by which the latter is circumscribed.[1]

In this characteristic remark from Kant we find what could hardly be a greater contrast with the Machiavellian perspective. Machiavelli's plea for realism is enthusiastically rejected by Kant for whom realism, whether sophisticated or not, could never be entertained by the truly moral individual.

This is indicative of the movement away from the Machiavellian perspective which is to be found in more modern responses to those problems highlighted by that perspective. As we shall see, there is a sense in which such responses may be said to involve a certain loss of awareness of the 'richness' which attaches itself to the Machiavellian account. And this is not unrelated to the bringing to bear of new concepts and approaches made available by Enlightenment thinking.

Machiavelli's analysis of political action served to reveal in the fullest way the central problem of political ethics in the context of the possibility of decay - of the retreat to 'inwardness'. Thus formulated, this central issue is productive of difficulties associated with the relations between power and moral legitimacy and a disturbing indeterminacy with respect to limits. However, with the emergence of radically new perspectives upon social and political life, new possibilities become apparent. The notion that the difficulties inherited from Machiavelli may be amenable to theoretical resolution becomes a new pre-occupation which has as its foundation the possibility of resolving the central problem which is their origin - the problem of 'dirty hands'.

An analysis of this particular response to Machiavelli is crucial to an understanding of modern approaches to political ethics, approaches which in important ways provide

the background against which modern political practice is
to be viewed. Equally, it will enable us to assess the
strengths and weaknesses of that theoretical background.

Kant proves central here for two reasons. First,
Kant, who often appears as the Enlightenment thinker par
excellence, displays a deep and intellectually thorough-
going commitment to certain concepts which prove fundamental
in their implications when brought into contact with political
ethics. His pre-occupation with reason (most especially in
relation to moral philosophy), with individualism and with
legalistic formulations provide us with a compelling
challenge to the Machiavellian approach. Second, despite
the rigour of this challenge, Kant is not insensitive to
the possibility of 'dirty hands' problems. Thus, we are
able to assess the results of an awareness of the problem
when it is placed in a transformed philosophical context.

We might also note here the sense in which Kant
represents a modern, somewhat transformed treatment of
republicanism. Like Machiavelli, Kant is concerned, in
his thinking about politics, with the question of how a
political community may be understood as providing an
arena in which individuals may express and develop themselves.
The theme of the moral relationships between the lives of
citizens and the nature of the public world they inhabit is
one which troubles Kant as it did Machiavelli. Equally,
with this connection in mind, a study of the implications
of Kantian philosophy allows us to view the considerable
transformation this approach represents in terms both of
the general treatment of republicanism and the particular
consequences for questions in political ethics.

Referring back to the above remark from the _Critique_
of Pure Reason, we get the sense of the way in which, for
Kant, moral considerations take on a stricter form; a form
which carries with it the possible implication of an equally
strict separation between moral and political questions.

The exclusion of politics from the arena of moral judgment
is correspondingly highlighted (of course, for Machiavelli,
it was equally the case that politics should stand in a
position of 'liberation' with respect to immediate moral
demands but we must remember that this problematic claim
on behalf of political action rests upon the idea that it
has a moral force of its own). To see how far Kant leads
us in this direction, we must first examine the foundations
of his approach found in his moral philosophy.

What is initially striking about Kant's understanding
of morality is its studied lack of 'worldliness'. The
moral individual should

> ...prize the mere consciousness of
> a righteous will as being apart from
> all advantageous consequences, apart
> even from the shadowy reward of
> posthumous fame, supreme over all
> other values.[2]

In so far as morality is related at all to questions of
worldly life and of citizenship, it is related only to
"citizenship in a better world".[3] Those phenomena which,
in Machiavelli, are presented as the driving forces of
social cohesion and political action - the preparedness
to reconcile oneself to 'things as they are', the commitment
to the city and the desire for glory - are all, for Kant,
beyond the ambit of any moral claim or judgment. The
"inclination for honour" is something which although
sometimes to be encouraged (where it is beneficial) is
nevertheless morally inestimable because,

> ...its maxim lacks moral content,
> namely the performance of such actions,
> not from inclination, but from duty.[4]

Here we find the key to the difference between the two
perspectives. Certainly, Machiavelli was also concerned
with questions of duty; and most particularly with one's
duty toward the city, for which, if necessary, one must
sacrifice one's soul. However, in Kant, the idea of duty
takes on a radically different and considerably more
restricted form. As the above remark suggests, Kant
conceives of duty as something which can be understood as
necessarily contrasting with inclinations of any sort.[5]

The premise that duty may be thus defined is the central informing principle of Kant's ethics. Moral duty must be entirely for its own sake: it must be formal, non- purposive and unconnected with any form of desire. A question which immediately confronts us here is that of what remains for the moral individual. Once we have abstracted away from all particular motivations, desires, purposive projects and relationships, we seem to have bracketed off all those concerns and attitudes which provide the foundations for characteristic human activities. Such a process of abstraction appears to leave us only with an entirely 'de-natured' individual. Kant's response, however, is to point to the crucial part played by reason. When all particular objects and motivations are removed, the power of pure reason still remains as a determinant with respect to the human will.

It is through our existence as rational beings that we become moral beings and, in this way, two fundamental aspects of reason become crucial for the possibility of moral life. First, it is possessed as a faculty by individuals and second, it is universal in its operations. This renders reason unique in that it supplies the possibility of a set of motives for individual action which depend for their force upon nothing else in the world.

We can raise a further significant aspect to the Kantian approach by mentioning another obscurity: how can we assign to the faculty of reason the power to command the human will whilst at the same time resisting the temptation to present any further reasons or justifications? What kind of power is being represented here? Kant's answer to this is connected with his wider critical philosophy.

The general project of providing a critique of human reason, which serves to limit its speculative possibilities, implies a crucial distinction. The task of establishing a necessary relationship between the understanding and sense experience - where each without the other becomes redundant - involves a distinction between the 'noumenal'

and 'phenomenal' realms, between things as they are and
things as they appear when they are rendered intelligible
through the application of the categories. This distinction
is reproduced in other terms such that it is relevant to the
moral life.

It is only the 'interaction' between conceptual
categories and the noumenal realm as an object of mediate
experience which makes either term epistemologically relevant,
generating a knowable 'world'. However, the terms in this
relationship remain as terms (i.e. logically prior to the
relationship itself) and thus, the distinction between noumena
and phenomena is still one that is held to make sense. And
further, from this, a distinction is possible between the
individual as a knower of the world, as an agent in the world
of appearances, and the individual as a possessor of pure
reason, as an intelligence.

In this sense, it becomes available to talk of the
individual as a 'noumenal being'.[6] It is to the extent
that human beings can be characterised from the perspective
of the noumenal side of this dualistic divide that they are
moral and recognise the unadulterated compulsion of reason:
> ...this 'I ought' is properly an
> 'I will' which holds necessarily
> for every rational being provided
> that reason in him is practical
> without any hindrance.[7]

It is our nature as rational, autonomous beings that allows
reason in and of itself to become a practical force. To the
extent that we can let this part of our being dominate, we
display a tendency toward acting "as reason by itself would
act".[8] We display a movement toward the (unattainable) goal
of the "Holy will" where reason acts entirely unopposed.[9]

It is initially difficult to see how reason can
operate legitimately here. It is characteristic of
speculative thinking that it breaks the synthetic connection
between thought and experience and moves, redundantly, into
the field of pure ideas, where reason aims to make judgments
on its own.[10] However, in the context of ethics, for Kant,
pure reason can become practical precisely because it does
not aim at making empirical judgments or giving any sort of
account of the empirical world.

Further, as a member of the intelligible world, the
individual is potentially universal. There can be no
multiplicity of perspectives in this realm since all
particularities, contingencies and distinctions are left
behind. This is the criterion of free, rational agency,
expressed in Kant's formulation of the categorical
imperative:

> Act as if the maxim of your action
> were to become through your will a
> universal law of nature.[11]

The criterion, then, is one of consistency with respect to
free, rational action such that, in essence, rational agency
provides its own compelling ends.

Kant's method does not allow us to deduce any ultimate
and exhaustive set of principles. What we are left with is
a means of testing practical judgments to see whether they
can genuinely be accounted as consistent with the pre-
suppositions of maintaining a moral life at all. We have,
then, a moral law or standard to which reference can be made.

Before moving to a direct examination of Kant's
treatment of political ethics, it is worth noting some
features of the approach we have outlined which will prove
relevant when brought into contact with questions of political
action. These are features which play an important part in the
movement away from the Machiavellian perspective. First,
Kant's attempt to establish the purity of reason as the basis
of moral judgment generates the possibility of viewing the
moral agent in abstraction. The individual becomes the
bearer of a sovereign will which, to the extent that it
exercises itself as a truly moral will, acts necessarily
in a way which defies the demands of worldly life.
'Inwardness', then, is raised to the point of absolute
moral superiority. Furthermore, since we are considering
the possibility of morality in terms which can only be
grounded in a categorical imperative, all questions of
particularity with respect to duties and responsibilities
are rejected. Thus, as Beiner notes,

> The activity of judging cannot be
> inhibited by any supposedly prior
> relations of love or loyalty.[12]

And this applies as much to any particular society as it does to any particular personal obligation. The city can no longer be the focus for ethical life or the source of overriding duties.

In this sense, Kant's approach establishes a primacy of private over public in so far as 'private' here proves ultimately more universal and absolute than do the logically subsequent particularities of social commitment.

Kant does not see the good will as the only good:

> Such a will need not on this account
> be the sole and complete good, but it
> must be the highest good and the
> condition of all the rest, even of
> all our demands for happiness.[13]

There may, then, be other sorts of imperatives that we might duly recognise as productive of 'goods', but two essential points must be added. First, none of these other goods can be regarded in a moral light: there is necessarily only one form of the categorical imperative (although it may be expressed in alternative ways) and all other 'goods' can only be products of hypothetical imperatives (which have nothing to do with morality at all). Secondly, and related to this, moral claims are necessarily supreme and should infuse all actions. Contingent goods may legitimately be pursued but only if the moral law is not thereby called into question or its supremacy challenged.

Indeed, it is partly in order to avoid unseemly questioning of this supremacy that moral philosophy proves important. The demonstration of the compelling nature of pure practical reason is necessary,

> ...in order that it may escape from the
> embarassment of antagnostic claims and
> may avoid the risk of losing all
> genuine moral principles because of the
> ambiguity into which is easily falls.[14]

There is an inevitable tendency to pose other goods against that of pure duty as if they had an equal status and were qualitatively similar; but the distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives disproves this absolutely.

Implicit in this argument is the notion that all other 'goods' are necessarily subjective. Kant groups all such alternative 'goods' under the general title of 'happiness'.[15] They are all associated in some way with the pursuit of particular personal aims or satisfactions.[16]

In addition to this, it is worth noting the legalistic dimension to Kant's thinking. The moral way of life becomes, for all rational beings (who are also empirical beings), subsumed under the moral law. Typically, legalistic frameworks do not tell us how to live our lives: they necessarily abstract away from particular commitments, choices and projects as a generalised standard against which particularities might be measured. In this way, morality, just like a determination to obey the law, remains external to any particular life-project.

Morality, on this view, ceases to make itself an intrinsic feature of the personality as such.[17] The possibility of ascribing to individuals positive moral virtues understood as characteristics is weakened by the process of abstraction which Kant places at the root of moral judgment. This equally calls into question the possibility of genuine moral conflicts. The abstract, rational character of the moral law issues in an intrinsic refusal to entertain problems of conflicting demands, which are, after all, distinctively 'worldly' problems.

With these salient features of Kant's moral thinking in mind, we are now in a position to assess the relationship between moral judgment and political practice which is implied by the Kantian perspective and to analyse what it means for the question of 'dirty hands'.

One re-formulation of the categorical imperative runs thus:

> Act always in such a way as if you
> were through your maxims a law-
> making member of a universal kingdom
> of ends.[18]

This formulation has implications for a view of politics.
Given that individuals are the possessors of reason, respect
for its absolute, universal laws equally implies respect
for individuals who are all (like oneself) free, moral beings.
Perfect duties toward others therefore become central to a
political constitution.

That the moral law does imply something about how one
treats others means necessarily that it must hold sway in
all considerations of the treatment of others (according
to the principle that the moral law is absolute and supreme)
including considerations of politics.

> (Right) ought never to be adapted
> to politics but politics ought
> always to be adapted to right.[19]

In considering the moral law from the perspective of a social
principle, the movement is made from internal legislation
over the individual will to external legislation over conduct.
In this way, the possibility of coercive authority is
established which is nevertheless in accordance with
principles of moral reason. Politics is understood as "the
applied branch of right" unified with morality as the
"theoretical branch of right".[20]

This movement from internal to external legislation is
far from inconsequential. The abstraction involved in right
considered as universal law, when it is made external,
effects a break with the inner life of the individual that
is so crucial to morality. In this sense, the account of
politics which is deduced from Kant's ethics involves,
ironically, the formulation of a political framework which
does not concern itself in any way with the moral condition
of those to whom it is directed. A true constitution, fully
expressing the principles of right is adequate to the task of
imposing moral order upon even a nation of 'devils'.[21] Political
right, then, has a formal and minimal character. And here we
find a deep contrast with Machiavelli, where reference to the
virtue of the political agent is made central. Rather, for
Kant, sovereignty, in possessing a moral foundation, resides
in the rational will of all the people, embodied in the
formal system of universal constitutional principles.[22]

In the light of this formal approach, we can anticipate difficulties with respect to questions of political agency.

Kant is however aware of such difficulties and does entertain questions concerning political action in conditions of uncertainty, which is not readily incorporated into an abstract framework of political right. Politics might dictate that one should follow the maxim "Be ye wise as serpents" but morality adds, by way of qualification, that we must be "harmless as doves".[23]

The crucial question here is whether these two demands can exist together in a single command or whether it implies that politics and morality are necessarily at odds with one another. Kant's answer is clear:

> ...it is absurd to suppose that
> they are in opposition, and the
> question of how such a conflict
> could be resolved cannot even be
> posed as a mental exercise.[24]

The fact that politics only gains its legitimacy on the basis of a derivation from the principles of moral right means that the legitimate demands and imperatives of politics cannot, logically, contravene the moral law. Therefore, if, in practice, political imperatives appear to defy moral standards, we must assume that this appearance is a midleading one. A moral principle such as that of honesty may not appear to govern political agency but in reality such a transcendent principle is

> ...an indispensible condition of
> any policy whatever.[25]

Valid political policy is determined by the principle of political right which is universal and directed toward the end of perpetual peace. Honesty is intrinsic to this universal condition of freedom, the public, social counterpart of the moral law.

Absolute moral principle, then, is effectively sovereign over all political practice:

> The god of morality does not yield
> to Jupiter, the custodian of violence,
> for even Jupiter is still subject to
> fate.[26]

Legitimate politics is grounded in reason which is as
abstract and universal as is moral reason. And thus,
there can be no sense in which the political agent can
claim that he has to act badly in order to act well in a
political context. The problem of 'dirty hands' therefore
appears to be theoretically excluded on the Kantian view.

An initial objection to Kant's approach is that his
theoretical derivation of political right from moral
principle fails to grasp the practical dimension intrinsic
to political practice i.e. that within an abstract system of
political right, questions of expediency, of means and ends
and of plural politics emerge which provoke a distinction
between the operations of moral judgment and claims with
respect to political ends.

However, the issue is complicated when we note that
Kant's view of the superiority of the moral law is made
to extend to questions of social teleology. As we have
seen, Jupiter, the "custodian of violence", invoking the
employment of expedient reason (linked with action in
conditions of conflict) remains "subject to fate" i.e. is
confined to the realm of uncertainty with respect to ends.
Expedient reason lacks the cognitive power to determine the
relationship between means and ends. For Kant, the mistake
here is to view ends as particular rather than as universal
and thus as generative only of hypothetical imperatives,
where ends relate only contingently to means. However, as
always for Kant, reason employed in a pure sense is in fact
more truly 'practical'. Thus employed, reason can produce
certainties in so far as it can determine unequivocally the
path of moral duty. At the same time, and for this reason,
it "shows us the way to our ultimate goal".[27]

Underlying this claim is a basic teleological
assumption. The ultimate end in human affairs can only
be perpetual peace - a state of fundamental harmony where
essential freedom is guaranteed. Such an end can only be
achieved through action which is itself free i.e. in
accordance with the moral basis of political right.

The relationship, then, is a qualitative one. This assumed
teleology is not an empirical claim, nor is it a necessary
truth. Rather, it appears as a regulative principle, not
in itself susceptible to any proof but essential to a
framework for the interpretation of human events which
would otherwise manifest only their "melancholy haphazardness"[28].

There is a danger, here, of losing any grasp upon the
distinctiveness of political practice and its imperatives.
Acting in a realm of particularities and appearances might
not be adequately founded upon abstract universal principles.
And this indicates a problem with Kant's teleological
assertions: they constitute, as we have noted, only an
'idea', a rationalizing assumption the status of which
must be contraversial even in the light of Kant's own
critical philosophy. Further, although it involves a
commitment to the notion of 'progress', it cannot be thought
of as properly an historical principle. Nor, in fact, does
it involve a full recognition of temporality and its role
in social existence. As a result various ways in which
distances might emerge between immediate and mediate
conceptions of the good appear to be ruled out.

Distinctively political imperatives therefore present
themselves in a problematic way. Kant's response is to
draw a distinction between the "moral politician" and the
"political moralist".[29] The former is defined as

> ...someone who conceives of the
> principles of political expedience
> in such a way that they can co-exist
> with morality.[30]

And this is in complete contrast with the political moralist
who,

> ...fashions his morality to suit
> his own advantage as a statesman.[31]

The latter, then, excuses political actions which are contrary
to the demands of morality on the pretext that human nature
makes it impossible for the good always to prevail. The
moral politician, on the other hand, is prepared to act
expediently but only where such actions at the same time
prove consistent with the moral law.

The distinction here does not resolve itself into two differing conceptions of moral legitimacy with respect to politics. Rather, the political moralist subsumes ethics under considerations of his own political advantage - his action is <u>self-interested</u>. This is consistent with Kant's general view that all hypotheticals, all imperatives contrasted with the moral law, are necessarily subjective and thus directed toward personal ends.

To have the true interests of the people and the state at heart entails acting in a moral manner:

> ...morality, with regard to its
> principles of public right (hence
> in relation to a political code
> which can be known a priori) has
> the peculiar feature that the less
> it makes its conduct depend upon
> the end it envisages (whether this
> end be a physical or a moral
> advantage) the more it will in
> general harmonize with this end.[32]

But the image of the moral politician is not thereby rendered entirely straightforward. It is clear that for Kant all questions of political advantage are ruled out from this position. Within the category of legitimate action which therefore remains, there is still a difficulty.

On the one hand, we might want to say that in the case of the moral politician, political action is entirely subsumed under moral imperative - he is one who acts simply out of moral duty for its own sake. This gains support from Kant's conception of moral progress which states an internal relation between moral practice and the end of perpetual peace. But this approach, which essentially implies the incorporation of politics into moral reasoning, does not give us the whole story.

As we have seen, in order to conceive of ourselves as truly moral beings we must pre-suppose of ourselves complete membership of a community of wholly rational wills; a 'kingdom of ends' of which complete harmony is an intrinsic feature. In so far as political society exists in its morally well-grounded form it aims at the realisation of freedom and

the possibility of recognising duty. This is the essence
of social progress in its moral aspect. In this sense,
the state of perpetual peace appears once again as a
teleological end of social existence.

Considered socially, then, the 'kingdom of ends' is
only an ultimate reference; it is for this reason that
politics and questions of right come on to the agenda.[33]
In the light of this, even the good political agent may
find it necessary to be expedient. We might demand that
this cannot involve acting in defiance of the demands of
morality; but what this means in a political context does
not necessarily co-incide with what it means in reference
to the moral agent considered in abstraction. In the first
place, the fact that politics may require instrumental
reason indicates a large gap between political and moral
reason; even if the political agent acts in accordance
with moral rules, he does not necessarily do so solely
for the sake of duty in and for itself.[34]

What is implied here is that morality, rather than
providing the context within which all political action
must take place, takes the form of a limit upon what may
be done in the name of expediency. Even if politics demands
a form of activity which does not gain the whole of its
motivation from the categorical imperative, one must never-
theless act always in accordance with the moral law.

On this view, the moral politician is limited by the
demands of conscience. But there is a problem with this
supposition: conscience is the mechanism by which duty
acts upon the will - and in so far as the duty it
expresses is that given by the categorical imperative, it
is therefore absolute.[35] In this sense, conscience is
viewed as a limit only with difficulty when we reflect on
the manner in which politics might require us to think and
act. We can recall here that the voice of Rubashov's
conscience fails to connect with the worldly imperatives
of his political project.

It might be objected that Rubashov suffers from an
eroded sense of moral duty: that his conscience is out
of touch not only with politics but also with his own
consciousness, to the extent that he cannot even adequately
voice it.[36] Thus we might respond, on Kant's behalf, that
the possessor of a fully developed sense of duty (an
effective conscience) would have a genuine means of
establishing limits upon political agency (such that it
remains within the ambit of the moral law).

But the problem runs deeper than this. The absolute
character of duty - which defines, in abstract form, the
sole criterion for a moral claim, denies all other claims
any moral status. Political reason, then, comes necessarily
under the heading of merely hypothetical, expedient judgment.
This has profound consequences for the idea of political
commitment - to commit oneself to political activity is to
commit oneself to a way of thinking and perceiving which
leaves little room for the recognition of the primacy of
conscience. It is in this sense that the Kantian image
of the conscience, precisely through the magnitude of its
demands, becomes unsuitable as a supplier merely of limits
upon other forms of practical reason and the forms of
activity they reflect.

We can take the analysis of the role of conscience
in politics further by looking at a particular example
of an imperative which might make itself felt even within
a framework of constitutional right. Situations may always
emerge which entail treating people in ways other than that
which recognises their absolute freedom - i.e. treating them
as means rather than as ends in themselves.

This does not constitute an immediate problem for Kant.
He specifies that we should not treat another merely as a
means; one must treat them at the same time as an end.[37]
But how is it possible to treat someone as a means to an
end and as an end in themselves at one and the same time?
The answer to this becomes clear when we remember that human
beings as ends in themselves are human beings considered as
members of the intelligible realm - as purely rational wills.

In the light of this, treating someone as an end in themselves is to act in accordance with some end in which they could rationally share. Conversely, treating another merely as a means is to treat him as a means to an end in which he cannot rationally share.[38]

In one sense this might appear to bring Kant closer to Machiavelli. If we understand Kant's formulation here as referring to ends understood as outcomes, possibilities of self-interest productive of moral goods seem to re-emerge. One could conceive of situations where a self-interested agent, prepared to treat others merely as means in fact produces ends to which those others can rationally agree. But this is to ignore the full implications of Kant's notion of the moral will. When we talk of the rational will, we must recognise the relevance of motives. When the rational will operates, it is through the command of pure reason i.e. it involves the formation of judgments with respect to what is _appropriate_ as an end-in-view.

But there are difficulties here when we consider the case of the agent whose motives and intentions are entirely moral. In the course of such activity, treating another as a means appears to be legitimised on Kantian terms: the ends involved are by definition ones in which the other can rationally share. In this sense, the fact that the other may disagree with being used is irrelevant.[39] The assumption that the other is a rational will is equivalent to assuming that (_as_ a rational will) he _does_ approve of the ends of the activity - and he who wills the ends wills the means. As a consequence, it becomes permissible for the agent to treat another as a means with no concern for his view of the matter.[40]

We can put these considerations in context by a further contrast with Machiavelli. The Kantian approach may be said to avoid one of the central difficulties with which Machiavelli leaves us. We have seen that, with the image of the prince, a problem emerges with respect to motivation and its moral relation with outcomes. Actions only gain a legitimacy in politics (and therefore begin to make real

demands upon moral suppositions) when they are directed toward
the well-being of the city, but it appears possible to
associate success and the social good with the ambitious
prince. For Kant, however, this difficulty does not arise.

Kant's conception of evil is relevant here. It is
impossible to will the maxim of an evil act be a universal
law. The principle of universability remains applicable
only to the good - to the maxim of the opposite of the act
concerned. In this way, to commit a bad act must involve
making an exception of oneself with respect to the moral
law.[41]

However, we might understand a sense in which the idea
of making an exception of oneself is a feature of political
practice. This is certainly so on the Machiavellian view:
the prince is precisely an 'exceptional' individual and, to
the extent that he is the possessor of significant powers
(judgment, charisma, vision - political capacities associated
with the idea of 'virtu'), we regard him as 'released' in a
certain way from the bonds which tie the ordinary citizen
to the moral good. Further, this is not confined to the
image of the prince. Considered more generally, the idea
of political agency involves a certain transformation in
the character of the relations pertaining between the agent
and others. This may be so not only in the sense that
certain distinctions one would normally make are left aside
but also in that certain other sorts of distinctions not
appropriate to the 'normal' moral landscape of the individual
become relevant. Implied here is the possibility of
recognising imperatives other than those which would
constitute a system of pure moral duty. That these
features of political life do indeed involve a form of
exception is crucial for recognition of 'dirty hands'
problems. The demands of morality remain even in the light
of an acceptance of the validity of political agency.

Once again, here, we run up against the apparent
contradiction which on Kantian terms is intolerable. For
this reason, within the category of judgments and decisions

which may be said to involve the making of an exception, Kant cannot recognise any further distinctions. The only way of characterising these forms of judgments is by reference to personal desires or interests. (There is a sense in which Kant abolishes the problem of the blurring of distinctions between real and apparent cases of 'dirty hands' by assigning all cases to the merely apparent).

There is a corollary to this: whereas in the Machiavellian context the idea of self-sacrifice may be attached to the morally problematic political agent, this cannot be the case for Kant. We can recall that, for Machiavelli, the princely actor must sacrifice his soul, for which, ultimately, no earthly reward can fully compensate. He must equally be prepared to endure the hatred, emnity and moral outrage of others; and this he does for the sake of the city. For Kant, on the other hand, such moral 'self-sacrifice' has more general implications: to lie, for example, regardless of the reasons, constitutes more than a sacrifice of one's own principles: "...a liar treats both himself and others as mere means."[42] Thus, for Kant, sacrificing one's own soul is at the same time to denigrate the soul of others. As an offence against the moral law, lying involves the denial of the supremacy of the rational will. On these grounds, special dispensations for the political agent are once again rejected.[43]

These difficulties lead to two general considerations. First, reference to an abstract moral will or to the 'pure conscience' of the agent becomes fragile when brought into contact with strong political claims. Kant absolutely opposes the idea that there could be a multiplicity of goods which make varying, legitimate demands upon the judgment of the agent. This approach is suggestive of a resolution of the 'dirty hands' problem through a 'reconciliation' of politics with morality. However, given that this determination is a 'pure', abstract one (with its roots in an 'intelligible' world - an ideal reference) difficulties arise when issues surrounding action in the social world are aired.[44]

The second consideration here applies to the question
of formal constraints upon political agency. Kant's
conception of persons as ends in themselves makes the
stipulation of negative rights a central strand of public
right as a whole. This might be said to establish an agenda
which places firm and absolute restrictions upon what is
permissible in political terms (and, Kant would wish to
add, brings political life under the control of morality).
However, formal stipulations of this kind do not provide
an unproblematic framework. What may, at any particular
time, be involved in the maintenance of a system of public
right cannot itself be determined by the injunctions of
that system itself. Again, problems of plurality, decay
and temporality loom large in this context. The fact that
legality figures as a prominent criterion within such a
system may provide for the possibility of limits. But
limits of this sort are not strictly comparable with the
kinds of limits which might possible pertain with respect to
the 'dirty hands' problem. Within the bounds of a legal
system, questions of the moral status of political actions
can still be raised - the problem we noted earlier of using
people as means is in no way resolved.

Further, since in this sense criteria of legality
cannot unproblematically be equated with moral limits in
politics, the question remains as to whether, and in what
circumstances, it may be permissible to transgress legal
restrictions. A failure to address this question renders
public restrictions of this kind equally fragile. This also
appears to apply to the general criterion of publicity which
Kant seeks to apply to public policy.[45]

Whilst Kant was unwilling to countenance the possibility
of an autonomous field of political judgment and agency
which escapes any limiting relationship with ethics, it
remains a possibility resulting from the theoretical
suppositions underlying his treatment of political ethics.

It is in this light that we are able to understand the
Kantian approach as one which places the problem in a
setting where overt commitments to instrumentality may
become a necessary response.

In other words, implicit in the Kantian view is the
possibility of pessimism with respect to politics.[46] A
picture which poses the 'realities' of political necessity
against the abstract 'unworldliness' of moral principle
heralds an understanding of politics as a morally bankrupt
realm the principle of which is purely expedient.

This problem is itself susceptible to further responses.
To the extent that we might find the origins of the
inadequacies of the Kantian picture in his broader moral
philosophy, one such response might involve a re-casting of
ethical theory. The possibility of 'secularizing' ethics,
of making it 'worldly', may appear to represent a way of
understanding social action in general and political activity
in particular as standing in a genuine relationship with
morality. We may note here Mill's remarks concerning Kant's
principle of universalizability. In forming this principle,
Kant

> ...virtually acknowledges that the
> interest of mankind collectively or
> at least indiscriminately must be in
> the mind of the agent when conscientiously
> deciding on the morality of the act.
> Otherwise he uses words without a
> meaning: for, that a rule even of utter
> selfishness could not possibly be
> adopted by all rational beings - that
> there is any insuperable obstacle in
> the nature of things to its adoption -
> cannot be even plausibly maintained.
> To give any meaning to Kant's principle,
> the sense put upon it must be, that we
> ought to shape our conduct by a rule
> which all rational beings might adopt
> with benefit to their collective interest.[48]

Mill's re-casting of the Kantian principle has far-reaching
consequences which are nevertheless related to the Kantian
approach itself.[49]

Kant leaves us with the problem of how to judge in the
context of an opposition between pure principle and expediency.
In asserting a generalised social content to moral duty, in
investing it with a positive end, Mill proposes a means of
unifying these two forms of judgment. Utilitarianism presents
this possibility through making moral principle itself
fundamentally expedient. This may allow us to regard politics
in a newly optimistic light.

What does this mean for the question of 'dirty hands'?
In one sense, clearly, the problem does not arise. The
expedient character of political action does not come into
conflict with moral principle in so far as morality becomes
itself expedient. Given that the content which is afforded
to moral duty consists in 'benefit to the collective
interest', action in a political context which aims at the
good cannot on any other account be rendered morally
reprehensible. There is a sense, then, in which Mill's
utilitarianism appears to bring to full fruition the
expedient overtones which can be detected in a broadly
Kantian philosophical approach.

This is not to say that for utilitarianism no general
moral principles can be asserted. Mill affirms the imperative
not to lie as such a general principle and in one sense, the
explanation he provides for its validity mirrors the structure
of the Kantian argument. Whilst it may be temporalily or
personally expedient to lie, being prepared to do so simply
to get over some "momentary embarrassment" or to attain
some "immediately useful object" for oneself is in fact
self-defeating, since

> ...the trustworthiness of human assertion
> ...is not only the principal support of
> all present social well-being, but the
> insufficiency of which does more than any
> one thing to keep back civilization...[50]

Whilst the general structure of the argument is similar to
Kant's, the central difference is clear: the ultimate
foundation on which the delf-defeating character of the
denial of a principle is asserted is not pure reason (the
avoidance of contradiction) but a general reference to human
well-being, that is, to a certain expediency.

As a result, the imperative behind the principle is not a categorical one and exceptions become tolerable.[51] The problem here is clearly one of defining the conditions under which exceptions might legitimately be made. And given that the existence of a principle at all is, for Mill, grounded only on its utility, the definition of legitimacy is not a qualitative matter but rather is one of utilitarian calculation.[52] Political judgment is thus resolved into an application of means-ends rationality and there is no qualitative moral reference which could supply immediate limits upon agency (or, alternatively, could generate 'dirty hands' problems).

This does not imply that we are permitted no reservations with respect to politics: and here a further similarity between the implications of Mill's utilitarianism and of Kant's ethics reveals itself. On a utilitarian account, as we have noted, the end of good political activity is the collective interest which put in other terms demands the greatest happiness of the greatest number. But this is not immediately comprehensible as a substantive end; and thus, the utilitarian calculation is undermined. However, a response to this is available - one which Mill provides a basis for in On Liberty. Placed in the context of individualist assumptions, a reference to the general happiness resolves itself into the availability of the pursuit of individual interests.[53]

Questions of individual rights once again become relevant. The end of politics becomes understood as the facilitation of the pursuit of individual happiness and as a result, the 'protection' of the individual from social life in general and political power in particular becomes a criterion for morally legitimate political agency. In this way, the rights of the individual appear as a limit upon the exercise of political power for the sake of the general good.

Attendant difficulties arise in terms of political morality. As we have seen in respect of Kant, a system of

rights cannot be understood as adequate means by which moral limits can be applied to politics (or, indeed, by which political actions can be rendered morally relevant in other than an instrumental sense). This is so partly because stipulations of rights do not co-incide with moral judgments as such - it is possible to behave immorally toward someone without formally infringing their legal or political rights - and partly because a legalistic rights system cannot adequately cope with situations which might require infringements in order to protect the system as a whole (rendered in Machiavellian terms, this could be understood as a failure to recognise the potential obstacles presented by fortune).

Viewed from this perspective, the limited similarities between the two approaches take on a peculiar importance. Utilitarianism retains the impulse to provide a theoretical foundation for moral judgment (albeit in a way which removes its strictly a priori character) and it equally retains the image of the rational individual as the origin and focus of judgments. To this extent we find implicit in the utilitarian approach the denial of the possibility of genuine moral conflicts. Whilst Mill does not accept that pure rational principle can furnish full solutions to such conflicts, the introduction of substantial moral ends in terms of interests allows for the possibility of a rational calculation which equally promises a solution.

The attempt to demonstrate a theoretical approach which solves the problem of conflict constitutes at the same time a denial of the 'dirty hands' problem as we have characterised it. Moral theory which specifies incontestable judgments entails that conflicts between goods, between differing demands upon the conduct of the agent, cannot be understood as itself a moral problem (i.e. it is not a conflict within morality). Rather, it must be viewed as a conflict between morality and something else.[54]

When viewed in this way, the 'dirty hands' problem does indeed appear to prompt the search for a theoretical solution which can be supplied by an appropriate account of

the character and status of moral judgment. But as we
have seen, in the wake of a solution of this kind, political
practice presents an ominous threat.

It is in this sense that we might understand the
peculiar resultant pessimism (a _moral_ pessimism) concerning
politics. As Hampshire notes, there is a special sense of
optimism attaching to utilitarianism when placed in the
context of social action and broadly conceived conceptions
of ends. It is an optimism, however, which is morally
problematic in practice.[55] Our examination of Mill in the
context of the Kantian approach reveals the extent of this
potential optimism. A naturalistic re-casting of moral
theory creates new possibilities. But when larger social
and political questions are taken into account it seems
to be available to reject all moral reservations (in the
sense of rejecting any autonomous role for such considerations
apart from instrumental calculation).

In the development of a morally indeterminate picture
of political activity, we encounter the modern form of the
problem. The possibility of finding a relevant moral
reference applicable to politics can, in this context, be
understood only in terms which are external to the operations
of political judgment itself. Thus we are 'protected' from
politics by a framework which demonstrates a disturbing
fragility with respect to the severe demands which a
reference to political good might entail.

In order to see how this issues out in varying political
contexts, a further point needs to be made. Even in the
context of an overwhelming concern with instrumental
'realism', the possibility of disagreement over what is to
be done, in more than a strictly instrumental sense (i.e.
involving questions of what _ought_ to be done), may still be
given a place. Putting aside for a moment the issue of
whether the theoretical approach we have identified is an
adequate one with respect to problems of 'dirty hands', there
also remains a sense in which practical issues are not resolved.
And this is so partly because of the indeterminacy of ends
involved.

On a utilitarian account, the 'collective interest' or general well-being is the ultimate reference upon which political claims are based. But as we have noted, this is not a readily comprehensible reference: what counts as the general and ultimate interest of human beings is open to dispute and this is a dispute which might be re-cast in terms of conflicts over moral values.[56] There may therefore be a way consistent with the image of politics we have described in which moral references are retained through conceptions of the general interest (grounded in foundational conceptions of the 'good life'). In this sense, the notion of ideology becomes relevant as an ultimate (and exclusive) moral rationale for political agency.

One objection which might be made to the picture that has been drawn of the way politics is understood and practiced in the modern context is that it is unduly gloomy with respect to moral expectations. And, of course, we can point to much 'normal' political activity which is carried on in a way which does not invoke large moral concerns. That this is the case does not, however, negate the essential point. Politics practiced in the light of an understanding or image which, as I have argued, is inadequate to the questions raised by considerations of 'dirty hands' does not thereby necessitate the consistent and all-pervasive resort to outrageous means. The point, nevertheless, remains that such an understanding implies, under certain circumstances, an ominous autonomy attaching to instrumental politics with respect to moral judgment.

It is precisely under such conditions of urgency and disunity that political action is pressed hardest with respect to its ethical status; and the manner in which such competing claims have been framed in the context of the ideas under scrutiny in this chapter suggests that ultimately, where normal constraints are put under pressure and larger social questions are raised, moral references are retained only in a form expressed by competing sets of ideals.

The 'unworldliness' of absolute, qualitative moral judgments implies that they lose their relevance in the face of the corresponding 'pure realism' of political expedience. In so far as politics can be practiced in and through a system of innocuous, uncontested practices this difficulty may rarely press hard upon the theory. On the other hand, in less defined contexts, the question returns and an answer becomes available only where the abstract character of moral references is once again made relevant through their translation into future ideals.

It is in this way that radical, innovative political action may be seen to take on an intrinsically fanatical character.[57] The moral content of political claims and justifications is reduced to means-ends rationality which at its limit may involve questions of inter-generational sacrifice (the kinds of questions which set the terms of Gletkin's reasoning in Darkness at Noon). Political agency is thus in the grip of a prior moral theory and immediate assessment of actions is rendered irrelevant.[58]

There is a point to be made here concerning the relationship between theory and practice. I have argued in this chapter that certain theoretical approaches to the question of the moral status of political claims are inadequate: and I have further suggested that this is significant with respect to the actual practice of politics. We might wonder why this should be the case: it may be suggested that the practice of politics proceeds no matter how much or little one theorises about it. If this is the case, then the problem we are dealing with here is in fact a purely philosophical one.

But on reflection this is inadequate. Theories concerning what is actually going on in respect of a particular mode of social activity are rarely entirely separable from theories concerning how that social activity ought to be carried on (if only in terms of what limits are implied by a careful analysis of the meaning of an activity and its relations with other activities). It is in this

sense that inadequate accounts of what is involved in
certain actual practices may generate deep problems when
those practices are placed in more testing contexts.

At the same time, it would be misleading to afford
a strict primacy to theory. It is a less than intelligible
notion that theories spring out of thin air and there can
be no doubt that reflections upon practice - if they are
to make sense to us - are, from this point of view, parasitic
upon that practice. (In fact, one issue which emerges from
the considerations in this chapter is that of the problems
which result when certain aspects of judgment and practice
are 'theorized' - an issue to which we will return later).

In this sense, the task of arriving at a more adequate
understanding of the problem of political morality is
significant in respect of the relevance such an understanding
would have for what is available to us in practice.[59] To this
end, it is valuable to examine 'dirty hands' problems in
contexts (both theoretical and practical) where their
implications appear most difficult in the light of what we
have said so far and where, correspondingly, denials of
the validity of the problem are most ominous.

Before moving on to this however we must examine
responses to the tradition which seeks to deny the depth
of the problem from a perspective which centres upon politics
conducted in a more well-defined and determinate arena. This
will allow us to re-assess various themes surrounding the
central issue and in the ways they are relevant to an
account which seeks to assign to the 'dirty hands' problem,
its full depth. One such theme, which has arisen in
connection with both the original Machiavellian treatment of
the problem and the response provided by enlightenment
liberalism, is that of the relationship between public and
private spheres.

Notes

1. Kant (1933) p.313 (A319;B375)
2. ibid p.380 (A425;B426)
3. ibid
4. Kant (1948) p.64
5. Machiavelli, of course, recognises a morality appropriate to the private individual which might have this form, although his attitude toward it is somewhat ambiguous. The point, however, is whether any room remains for an ethical perspective upon the political realm in itself. Kant's derivation of moral principle is crucial in this connection.
6. This notion is, of course, far from unproblematic. See for example Scruton (1982) p.62
7. Kant (1948) p.110
8. ibid
9. Kant (1967) p.168
10. Kant (1933) p.101 (A63;B88)
11. Kant (1948) p.84
12. R.Beiner in Arendt (1982) p.101
13. Kant (1948) p.62
14. ibid p.70
15. ibid
16. The strict and self-generating character of the categorical imperative tends to bring all actions, including those which are unquestionably good when viewed 'externally', into question. Thus, for example, Kant regards the impulse to benevolence as desirable but ultimately not morally praiseworthy since it brings satisfaction to the agent. See Kant (1967) p.249. The possibilities for self-doubt here are clearly considerable.
17. There is a sense in which the moral law figures as intrinsic to the nature of all rational beings. But beyond this, it is transcendent of any particular character.
18. Kant (1948) p.100
19. Kant (1970) p.21
20. ibid p.116

21.   ibid p.112

22.   cf.Shumer (1979) p.20

23.   Kant (1970) p.116 (from Matthew X.16)

24.   ibid

25.   ibid

26.   ibid

27.   ibid

28.   Kant cited in Arendt (1982) p.24

29.   Kant (1970) p.118

30.   ibid

31.   ibid

32.   ibid p.123

33.   This is paralleled by Kant's ambivalence to nature and
      its relation with a philosophy of history. As Williams
      notes, 'nature' appears at once as a limit upon human
      freedom (a realm of necessity) and hence upon our
      capacity for moral action and as a pseudo-divine
      'providence' guaranteeing progress toward the good.
      see H.Williams (1983) p.2

34.   To insist upon the motive of action being duty for its
      own sake is itself problematic since, as we have noted,
      any assessment of motives will remain potentially
      incomplete - see note 16

35.   Nowell-Smith notes the move in Kant from the idea of the
      'good will' as a term covering all good motives to the
      'good will' as supreme in itself. This implies the
      supremacy of the clean conscience. See P.H.Nowell-Smith
      (1954) p.246

36.   Arendt remarks that "Whatever the voice of conscience may
      be, it cannot be said to be silent". H.Arendt (1982) p.4

37.   Kant (1909) p.52

38.   see H.E.Jones (1971) p.67

39.   ibid p.74

40.   The victim is not viewed as a victim, but only in
      abstraction from his particular standpoint.

41.   Kant (1948) p.87

42.   Kant cited in H.E.Jones (1971) p.21

43. For Machiavelli, the supremacy of the prince is predicated
    upon the existence of widespread corruption - a lack of
    civic virtue in the populace. On Kantian grounds,
    however, an abstract formulation presides where all
    individuals necessarily manifest an intrinsic moral
    worth.

44. Arendt notes that the principle of non-contradiction
    underlying moral judgment in Kant is applied not to
    the self as a personality in the world but to the self
    as a rational ego. - H.Arendt (1982) p.37
    For the rational ego, logically prior to the world,
    pure reason has a primacy, a supreme function, which
    it does for a comprehensively understood social being.

45. This is an avenue pursued further by Arendt via an
    analysis of the Critique of Judgment. The capacity for
    public judgment involved is attributed not to an engaged
    citizenry but to a general readership. In this sense,
    judgment gains its public character by reference to the
    possible rather than the actual judgments of others. It
    therefore has an abstract character which is inappropriate
    as a mode of judgment available to the political agent
    himself. Once again, therefore, it provides a trans-
    cendent standard which does not address itself to the more
    particular and contextualized problems of 'dirty hands'.

46. To this extent, Williams is correct to remark that Kant
    regarded the political state as a 'necessary evil' -
    H.Williams (1983) p.71

47. It would be wrong to say that Kant was overtly pessimistic
    in this way (although there is undoubtedly a strand of
    pessimism in his writings - see for example Kant (1948)
    p.72). The point however is that Kant's approach
    represents a perspective out of which pessimism may
    result when confronted with the realities of political
    practice.

48. Mill (1962) p.308

49. It would be exaggerating to suggest that Kant would have
    approved directly of utilitarian justifications. Clearly,
    however, he regards the Kantian approach as one which
    lends itself, with appropriate ammendment, to a 'worldly'
    ethic. cf. J.O.Urmson (1967) p.134. See also H.Arendt
    (1959) p.136

50. ibid p.274

51. A system of moral rules <u>can</u> undoubtedly be asserted
    on utilitarian view, but it appears that there will
    always be points at which a more primitive utilitarianism
    will have to be brought into play.   cf. J.J.Smart (1967)

52. see Mill (1962) p.275

53. ibid p.p. 184-204

54. In both cases, the 'something else' here is some
    manifestation of self-interest.   In this sense, although
    legalistic systems may not be <u>designed</u> to bear the
    weight of 'dirty hands' problems, in the approaches we
    have been considering, a new weight is placed upon such
    systems because there is no further space within which
    the problem may be located.

55. Hampshire (1978) p.4

56. This is of course a departure from utilitarianism itself.

57. This point does not apply <u>solely</u> to radical politics
    it may equally apply in conditions where established
    political forms are placed under threat.

58. This is not to say that the problem of fanatacism here
    is readily resolved by a recognition of the relativistic
    character of ideals.   As Macintyre notes, relativism may
    be regarded not just as a (problematic) theory but as a
    mode of self-conscious procedure which itself can generate
    problems associated with an emotive form of fanatacism.
    See A.MacIntyre (1981) ch.1

59. This may entail a consideration of more general claims
    concerning the social context within which action
    occurs; claims which come on to the agenda when we talk
    about a re-structuring of our thinking and hence of
    what we find is available to us in practice.   This will
    be discussed more fully later.

IV : <u>Public and Private Morality</u>

     Having seen how various theoretical standpoints
issue out in attenuated accounts of the 'dirty hands'
problem (resulting in correspondingly problematic
practical approaches) we are in a position to examine
dimensions to the question which have so far arisen in
a troubling way and which require closer attention if we
are to develop a firmer grasp on the central issue. A
number of these important aspects may usefully be
introduced under a heading of the general issue of the
public-private distinction.

     That this theme may prove significant for questions
of 'dirty hands' is emphasised when we consider again the
general implications of the treatments we have so far
assessed. We have seen how certain ethical standpoints
entail that the pure moral consciousness of the agent
(as a source of absolute principle) is posed against the
instrumental realism of politics. This model implies that
the essential conflict which might generate problems in
political ethics is not itself a moral conflict but rather
takes the form of an external challenge to morality. It
is equally a model which puts distinctions between public
and private morality on an uneasy footing.

     The emphasis placed upon the conscience of the
rational agent in Kant's moral philosophy renders the
concept of publicness somewhat problematic. Of course,
Kant offers a notion of the public realm which <u>is</u> morally
relevant through the translation of the moral law into a
system of citizenship under the principles of public right.
In so far as it is a morally relevant realm, the notion
of public life, life as a subject-citizen, is correspondingly
universal. It is in this sense that the idea of 'world-
citizenship' is crucial for Kant. The principles of public
life are derived from the universal demands of ethics: and
in the same way, one's moral existence involves an

appropriate ethical transcendence of particular standpoints and commitments associated with a contextualised citizenship. Accordingly, at the same time, particular distinctions made intelligible through the varying standpoints specified by a complex social organisation are rendered irrelevant to the moral status of public life and activity.

This is the foundation of Kant's assertion of publicity as a criterion of policy. The universalism attaching to ethical citizenship implies that all legitimate policy must necessarily be open to universal agreement. As we have noted, this provides for the possibility of a form of public judgment which gains a universal character through a reference to the possible judgments of <u>all</u> others (and which thereby, again, transcends all stand-points). To be truly universal in this sense clearly denies the possibility that judgment might be related to political engagement when particularities re-emerge. Thus, it does not provide a basis for any specific form of judgment peculiar to politics.[1]

On this account, the distinction between public and private is rendered superfluous with respect to questions of political morality. As conceived by Kant, such a distinction could generate no special moral difficulties. That the standing of public life is stated in terms which make it parasitic upon private moral life implies that no distinctive moral claims can be made by public agents and no special moral demands can be said to apply to them.[2]

In the light of this, and of the problems we have already discussed in relation to this kind of account, it seems that a renewed emphasis upon the distinction between public and private morality, may prove fruitful. We have noted in the case of Machiavelli the way in which the image of a more profound distinction between the morality of public action and that of private life allows us a

greater scope for considerations of 'dirty hands' problems.
But we have also seen that the Machiavellian account is not
without its difficulties in this respect.

In Machiavelli, 'realism' in relation to the political
world involves conferring upon the realm of public action
an autonomy with respect to private life. True commitment
to public action involves coming to terms with the fact
that, at least under certain conditions, public life
reveals itself to have a moral foundation entirely separate
from that of 'ordinary life'. But when the public realm has
the potential thus to cut itself adrift from the moral lives
of individuals, problems are generated when we remember that
it is a realm which is itself animated by the activities of
individuals. This comes to full fruition with the image of
the prince who, it appears, becomes an entirely public man.

We have noted the manner in which this model can
induce a 'blurring' of distinctions between real and
apparent cases of 'dirty hands'. And from another point of
view, we might say that threats are thereby posed to the
moral personality of the public agent. We can recall that
in Darkness at Noon Rubashov is only able to confront the
moral status of his political career when he is suddenly
isolated in prison. And the course which this confront-
ation takes indicates a certain 'erosion' of his moral
consciousness. The self as 'grammatical fiction' is an
idea which Rubashov has lived out in practice and
ultimately, in more than one sense, he pays for it.

In the light of this, a productive re-consideration
of the public-private distinction seems to require the
search for a deeper moral relation between the two. One
possibility is suggested by Thomas Nagel. In contrast
with Kant, Nagel sees public and private morality as
distinct, but nevertheless related by reference to a common
moral foundation from which they are independently derived.[3]

We can perceive that different obligations appear in
association with public and private life; but a simple
theory of obligation does not adequately explain the way
in which public agents may be 'released' from certain
obligations. For Nagel, this can be established by an
application of "ultimate considerations" to public
institutions.[4] Thus, legitimate institutions are bearers
of those moral suppositions or values which also manifest
themselves in private life; but because they are public
bodies rather than individual agents, the content given
to those values in practice is transformed in crucial ways.
Nagel characterises these transformations as involving a
particular impersonality and an emphasis upon long-term
social goals which prompts a greater emphasis upon outcomes
(and the immediate moral standpoints associated with life
as a private individual are correspondingly weakened).

This has two consequences. First, a certain
'ruthlessness' in public action is legitimised and, as a
result, a political agent may be required to do that which
conflicts with other (private) obligations or moral
standards they regard as bearing upon them. Second, we
can find, in the moral basis of institutions, a way of
judging public action such that we can identify cases
where the action demanded cannot be legitimised by the
morality of the institution.

On this account, it seems that some room can be
afforded to the question of 'dirty hands'. The distinction
between public and private morality renders genuine moral
conflict possible in public life. However, the question of
limits still needs to be raised. It cannot be asserted that
the private moral conscience of the agent is an adequate
source of such limits. It is precisely the essence of
participating in public life that one puts aside private
moral considerations. We might alternatively discover a
source of limits through moral assessment of institutions.

However, an assessment of this sort appears to be
limited to establishing what counts as a legitimate pursuit

for any particular institution. Thus within the bounds of
this general legitimacy, bounds which mark the point at
which the idea of getting one's hands dirty passes over
into public crime, there is a problem as to what possible
moral source there might be which would generate problems of
the 'dirty hands' variety. Nagel remarks that

> ...the strongest constraints of
> individual morality will continue
> to limit what can be publicly justified
> even by extremely powerful consequentialist
> reasons.[5]

However, it is hard to see how, on Nagel's account, private
moral concerns can be made genuinely applicable. Although
public and private morality are seen as having a common
foundation, the process of mediation which is implied by
the idea that each is independently <u>derived</u> from basic
assumptions suggests that to make one applicable to the other
is a confusion. The question of how individual values may be
legitimately applied to public life therefore remains open.
And if this is so, we might have to accept that the public
agent is free to assert an exclusive legitimacy which
transcends moral reservations. In this sense, we may be
forced to accept that the 'ruthlessness' inherent in public
agency is independent of 'dirty hands' problems.

This is matched by a consideration of the issue from
the point of view of citizens. Private morality cannot be
the source of legitimate claims with respect to the ethics
of public action - we cannot demand of public agents that we
be treated as we would in private life. In the light of
this, there seems to be some danger that we will begin to
lose sight of the 'dirty hands' problem. General claims
concerning legitimacy might remain available, but the formal
constraints which result could not be exhaustive or
incontestable. The public agent works with an ethic which
emphasises generality and consequentialism in the context of
a commitment to the public good. It is hard to see, at
least in some circumstances, how prior moral assumptions,
a fundamental set of social values, can make themselves
fully relevant in this context. We can only conceive of
such assumptions in the form of values expressed at their
highest level of generality. Nagel mentions issues of
liberty, rights and equality as instances of such
generalised social values.[6]

Clearly, one way in which such values could become
operative in respect of public agency is through legal
provisions which guarantee such things as rights and
equality of treatment and thereby define the moral direction
of public institutions. However, we have already noted that
the relationship between legality and 'dirty hands' problems
is itself a problematic one, as is the suggestion that
formal limits can adequately define what it is to retain
a moral commitment in the public realm.

An alternative way in which basic moral assumptions
apply may be in terms of something more like the Kantian
notion of public judgment. There may be some common
standard which reflects what people may legitimately expect
from, or demand of, their public institutions. But there
are also problems here. First, since we have transferred
the focus of moral consideration from 'dirty hands' problems
for the agent to external judgment, we are saying nothing
which is internal to public agency itself and as a
consequence, certain of its dimensions may not be accounted
for: secrecy for example, presents a problem in relation
to judgment.[7] Secondly, the basis of such judgments would
still have to be expressed in terms of some fundamental set
of values which could establish politically relevant demands
such as rights and equality. But such a set of values is not
internally unproblematic: questions concerning the ordering
of such values are not readily settled, and in so far as they
persist, such questions generate difficulties for an affirm-
ation of a general, foundational reference for judgment.

An essential problem here seems to be that in citing
the origin of judgment, and hence the source of possible
moral problems, in a prior set of moral assumptions, we do
not have the means at our disposal to define problems which
are directly applicable to the public agent himself. We have
no basis for thinking that the agent has reason to consider
his hands genuinely to be dirty. In order to find out
whether such reasons can be established, we need to consider
more closely the internal character of public life. Unless
all the features of action in this context that the agent
might find compelling are included, we are likely to
produce an account which, in abstracting from such features,
becomes flimsy as a basis for effective moral assessment.

We have seen that the power of Machiavelli's account lies in part in his deep awareness of the 'distance' which might exist between the realm of the political agent and that of ordinary moral perceptions. That the prince must be a 'fox' as well as a 'lion' serves to emphasise this fact. With this in mind, we must be aware of the sense in which a discrepancy might emerge between what may be characterised as the normal expectations concerning public agency or institutions and what becomes necessary in order that those institutions can persist and be effective.

A similar line is pursued by Martin Hollis in seeking to identify problems internal to the idea of holding public office.[8] Hollis focuses upon the example of the Glencoe massacre of 1692, the significance of which lies in the fact that it involved not simply murder but murder under conditions of trust. The implications of the case emerge most sharply in the situation of Colonel Hill, the governor of the region, who, by virtue of that role, participates in relationships with the local clans that involve the observance of particular conventions and consequent expressions of trust. His military duty, however, is clearly to follow orders, which in this case entails the murder of those who trust him (who trust him, that is, not simply as an individual but as an authority) − an action made possible precisely because a relationship of trust exists. For Hollis, this provides a key to understanding true 'dirty hands' problems.

Clearly, the case of Colonel Hill is very specific and in a certain way out of the ordinary. We therefore need to consider whether the example can adequately be generalised. Hill's position contrasts with that of others in the chain of command down which the order passed, a chain which stretches back to the King (whose hands, we may have reason to think, are also dirty). We can see, nevertheless, that if such an example can be generalised sufficiently to cover other cases of 'dirty hands' it provides a model which does have certain advantages. To the extent that Hill's problem

is internal to his position as an office-holder, we have
the basis of an account of 'dirty hands' which avoids the
problem of posing the principles or conscience of the agent
against political necessity. Hollis is committed to the view
that an agent has no ground on which to stand whereby
judgment is possible simply as a (pre-social) human being.
Thus, moral conflicts are generated not as a result of
conflicts between the moral self and its role, but rather
as a result of conflicts between or within roles themselves.[9]

The role-conflict in the case of Colonel Hill is clear,
but how can this apply to political agency in general? It
can only be made to do so if we can identify some relation
equivalent to the relation of trust existing between Hill
and the clans which applies to public office more generally.
Hollis suggests that we can do so if we consider public
authorities, including political ones, to be (when legitimate)
bearers of an authority derived from citizens. If this is
so, we might attach to the relation between citizens and
those in whom they have invested this authority some notion
of trust. Such a trust would, presumably, express itself
in the form of expectations - that public agencies will act
in the best interests of the people and will behave decently
and honestly toward them.

The point then is that 'dirty hands' problems may
emerge when those in office break the trust placed in them
by the people - which amounts to using the people's own
power against them - in order to carry out the task
allotted to them as public agents. Again, the case of
secrecy or deception is instructive here. An expression
of the relation of trust between citizens and their public
authorities may be thought of as the expectation on the part
of the former that they will not be lied to or otherwise
betrayed. Secrecy, misinformation, cover-ups and so forth
may thus be accounted as central cases of 'dirty hands'.
The fact that cover-ups prove necessary is evidence, for
Hollis, that the basic relation of trust or confidence is
vital.[10]

Hollis's account has two important implications.
First, we have good reason to be pessimistic about what

we can expect from politics, and that the expectations
we do have are likely to be ill-founded (whether we are
made aware of it or, more likely, not). Secondly, and
related to this point, we must accept that the 'dirty
hands' are ours in so far as those who act politically
are doing our dirty work for us. This is matched by the
fact that the problem encountered by the agent is a
socially inscribed one.

> (Hill's) dilemma was that of
> inescapable responsibility under
> partial constraint and his hands
> were dirty before he even began
> to resolve it.[11]

A crucial question here is whether in all such cases we
can identify a clear sense in which a public role creates
conflicting moral demands.

The case of Colonel Hill is clearer than most in this
sense because he is both a civilian governor and a military
commander. However, an agent acting within a single public
role may deny that his moral obligations extend further
than fulfilling that role as best he can, recognising no
special significance in the fact that he is trusted by the
people. On the one hand, we might take this simply as a
sign that the agent concerned has a poor sense of his moral
obligations. However, we might still maintain that there is
some difference to be discerned between the strong relation-
ship of trust in the case of Colonel Hill and any similar
relationship existing more generally between political
authorities and the people. The case of the King in
Hollis's example is instructive here (assuming that the
order was initiated by him and that he is regarded as a
political rather than divine authority).

This is so for two reasons: first, the King was
the one who made the decision rather than simply abiding
by it, and second, he was operating from within a single
role rather than with two simultaneous roles. Even though
the King did not stand in the same relation with the clans
as did Hill, the latter's public role (as well as his
authority as a soldier)derived from the authority of the

former. However, the fact that the King, unlike Hill, was
responsible for initiating the order does seem to alter the
case somewhat. Where policy is formulated rather than just
carried through, it may be seen to involve a certain amount
of moral leverage with respect to one's role. The situation
is less structured than that of Colonel Hill; and in this
sense, the King's hands are not necessarily or obviously
dirty before he starts. This is not to say that keeping
his hands clean _is_ an option he can pursue whilst
retaining his integrity (his integrity, that is, _as_ a
politician). The point, however, is that there is some
aspect of assessment involved including judgment
concerning what is to count as relevant to the moral
situation.

We may seem in danger here of re-introducing the
conscience of the agent as a source of moral arbitration
and thereby of re-introducing the problem of making an
'unworldly' (pre-social) moral perspective relevant. But
it is not clear that we __have__ to do so. In order to retain
some notion of open moral responsibility and a role for
judgment, we do not have to deny that 'dirty hands'
problems attaching to constituted political authority
are related to the roles and obligations generated by
that authority and therefore have a social origin. We
need only assert that roles, duties and responsibilities
are not entirely independent of the individuals that
animate them - and that it is possible to animate a role
in different ways is especially crucial in situations
that are not clearly structured, although it is not
necessarily confined to such situations.[12]

A second contrast lies in the fact that the King
(or whoever makes the political decision) occupies one role
rather than two.[13] Where one occupies two roles which
specify conflicting obligations, it appears that one can
more easily maintain that the decision to fulfil one of the
obligations does not entail rejecting the power or validity

of the other. In other words, the underpinning of a
perceived duality of roles renders it more readily
available to act in full consciousness of the fact that
one is getting one's hands dirty. Where there is just one
role involved, there seems to be less room for the assertion
of a genuine, and persisting, moral difficulty.

What is required of one acting in a single role
prompts one toward seeking a single answer. If this is
the case, problems arise for the agent with the possibility
of keeping a firm grip upon the 'dirty hands' problem where
obligations that conflict are not matched by conflicting
roles. In this sense, where moral problems associated
with agency are less clearly structured - where moral
considerations do not derive from an alternative role
and where policy is to be initiated - the effect is to
place a greater onus back upon the moral resources of the
agent and to pose anew the question of how 'dirty hands'
problems are to be given a place in the practical perspective
of the agent.

It is important to recognise the sense in which
'dirty-hands' problems require that they are problems
for the agent - that a certain moral responsibility
attaches to them. Unless this is so, when we focus upon
the agent, a poor moral sense will do as well as a refined
one in any particular case. And this clearly has ominous
implications for political agency considered generally.[14]
As Bernard Williams notes, what kind of moral character we
wish to see in political agents is important.[15] That an
agent is willing to regard the exercise of power in extreme
and instrumental ways as a necessity he can easily bear
(in moral terms) is reason to be worried. Morally suspect
actions may be intrinsic to political agency but questions
of limits and of moral sensitivity remain important.
For this reason, the moral character of the agent and the
way in which 'dirty hands' problems may bear upon it is a
relevant consideration.

Williams suggests the idea of 'reluctance' as a key theme here. Where political agents are in the business of formulating policy or making decisions, moral problems of the 'dirty hands' variety may well arise: but it is crucial in what way these problems are regarded by the agent.

> ...only those who are reluctant or disinclined to do the morally disagreeable when it is really necessary have much chance of not doing it when it is not necessary.[16]

That one may be reluctant to do what one knows to be the best thing is indicative of a sensitivity to the moral costs involved. The question is essentially one of how agents are disposed toward the tasks facing them. In this sense, a relation is established between public and private morality through reference to the moral character of the individual.

We might say, of course, that in many cases where one has to get one's hands dirty, the presence of this sort of moral reluctance is redundant in so far as it does not show itself, that it makes no difference to what is done. And if this is so, then the supposed relation between individual moral concerns and public duty is itself only expressed as a private concern. But for Williams, the crucial point remains that it may operate as a guarantee that the agent will not engage in morally problematic activities too readily and, as a result, the possibility of passing over from acting in this way when it is necessary to doing the same when it is not is correspondingly diminished.

And this raises again the relationship between what we have previously termed the 'internal' and 'external' limits to the 'dirty hands' problem. The demand which Williams suggests we might make upon the character of political agents implies the possibility of limiting the range of genuine 'dirty hands' problems. Although this does not precisely co-incide with what we called 'external' limits to the problem in chapter II. The issue of limits is implicitly re-formulated as one which concerns itself with the way in which the political agent may fall into a mechanical brutality rather than the problem of distinguishing

between political necessity and personal power which
emerged from the Machiavellian account.[17] There is a sense
in which this change of emphasis may be understood as a
function of the attempt to mediate between personal and
public moral spheres - we can recall that in Machiavelli,
the absolute incompatability of public and private created
problems for the individual agent conceived of as a
'public man'.

The reference to moral dispositions may be significant
in relation to the fact that engagement in politics might be
a brutalising experience. One problem associated with public
agency is that too close an identification with one's role
as a public agent may encourage a 'technical' approach to
politics.

We saw in relation to Darkness at Noon the sense in
which such a technical approach may express itself in a
thoroughgoing consequentialism. The recognition of a place
for moral character may permit a response to this. When we
consider the demands of political expediency, when, for
example, action x is required in order to achieve state of
affairs y, we can frame two questions which constitute a
moral interrogation of the justification involved. First,
we might ask whether x is really necessary for the
achievement of y; and second, we might question whether
y is itself really necessary. Now it might be argued here
that a pure consequentialist approach deals perfectly well
with these considerations. However, we might recognise a
sense in which moral character makes a difference.

There are situations where the questions mentioned
above seem to take on a special urgency - namely where
action x appears itself to be morally problematic. And
this is a distinction which a pure consequentialism tends
to deny. A sensitivity to possible moral costs involved in
expedient action may therefore have important implications
with respect to the tendency on the part of the agent to be

mindful of such questions and always to press them.
A reluctance to engage in morally dubious action even
where it appears to be politically justified implies that
the question of whether it is really justified will always
be given a prominence. Equally, where chains of
consequential reason are involved, there will be a
tendency to press such chains of justificatory reason to
their limit, i.e. to press toward higher considerations
of political duty.

Clearly, the way in which the role of moral character
may establish the possibility of a persistence of moral
sensitivity in the context of practical judgment is central
here. And at this point, we might ask whether this implies
anything for an account of what we termed 'internal' limits
with respect to 'dirty hands' problems. Possibilities of
this sort would take the form of judgments which affirm the
moral costs of certain politically desirable actions to be
too great. A consideration of such limits clearly becomes
more prominent as the situation of the political agent
becomes more 'open'. In such situations, questions
concerning the qualitative relation between action in the
present and political outcomes may become more relevant.
In one sense, this may be analysed in terms simply of
further, more subtle consequential considerations - where,
for example, striking certain moral postures might have
consequences with respect to others' responses and to future
opportunities. In addition, however, there may be
situations where political considerations are not easily
characterised in terms of some set of determinate aims or
goals. Contexts best characterised in this way imply a
more immediate relation between the moral character of
actions and the political rationale which informs and
shapes agency itself.[18] Considerations of this sort demand
our attention more urgently in contexts of considerable
social innovation and we shall discuss the issues more
fully later on in relation to situations where the moral
character of those animating political processes has a
particular relevance. For the moment, however, we might

turn our attention to the more general observation, that
not all political judgment can be fitted into a consequential
framework.[19]

Returning briefly to Williams' account, we might note
that it centres upon the situation of the 'policy-maker',
the political agent who is in the business of making
decisions and establishing procedures. If we turn to the
case of the agent who is in a more highly determined
position, confined to putting things into practice or
obeying orders, the role for moral reluctance seems less
certain. When cases of this sort are brought into
consideration, we are led to press harder upon the idea of
moral dispositions.

In the light of this, we need to ask whether there is
a relevant difference between having principles or a moral
conscience which one nevertheless overrides in politics and
manifesting a sensitive moral character. If 'reluctance'
is assimilated to the private conscience of the agent, then
it is hard to see how it can gain a genuine foothold with
respect to these cases of highly determined activity. Such
cases precisely highlight the inadequacy of conscience which
demands to be heard exclusively and which, in conditions
where practical demands press closely, may prompt us, like
Ivanov, to cover our ears.

Elsewhere, Williams supplies what could be a possible
response to this by reference to the notion of 'regret'.[20]
In situations of a highly structured moral dilemma, it _is_
possible to make a decision and act upon it without thereby
negating the alternative. Clearly, in one sense, the
alternative _is_ negated in that, as is the nature of the
case, it ceases to be an available course of action.
However, a recognition of its persisting moral relevance
may express itself in the form of a regret. This is one
way in which the place of moral character might be
affirmed even in highly determined contexts.

However, the idea of 'regret' here is not unproblematic. It may have unfortunate overtones in so far as it is frequently used to indicate a bad conscience. One regrets what one has done often in the sense that would imply that one would do otherwise if one had another chance. This is not to say that 'regret' always has to have these connotations. As Williams notes, there is a difference between regretting that one had (in a moral sense) to do something which goes against the grain and regretting having done something one realises one simply ought not to have done.[21] We might argue that only the latter form is relevant to cases of moral conflict i.e. that if one has done the right thing there is no reason for regret. On this view, the former sort of regret is rendered superfluous on the grounds that it is irrational. On the other hand, we may have grounds for thinking that this is not enough to justify dispensing with the former response since it says something not about one's logic but about one's moral character.

However there is still a sense in which talk of moral character may seem to place 'dirty hands' issues more squarely back into a frame of reference in which the distinction between public action and private morality is foundational. If this is so, questions of moral disposition may become less useful: we find ourselves moving more in the direction of what Michael Walzer refers to as the 'Catholic' account of the 'dirty hands' problem.[22] On this account, the agent accepts the role which dirties his hands but pays for it through a punishment of some other sort, such as one of persistent regret or guilt. As Walzer notes, in the case of political action, there is no public standard by which such punishments could be demanded or affirmed - it amounts to a purely personal moral punishment.[23]

Thought of in this way, responses of this sort do not appear to have any necessary implications with respect to the manner in which political agents relate to their tasks. A sense of private moral scrupulousness is not necessarily inconsistent with a technical and brutalised attitude toward political agency. However, this does not

render the reference to moral character fruitless. We may be able to say more here which would give us reason to think of such a reference as constituting a highly significant aspect of the 'dirty hands' problem.

It is important to emphasis here that the introduction of a notion of moral character into our picture of 'dirty hands' problems does not have a 'problem-solving' role. It will not furnish us with the possibility of arriving at theoretical moral answers to questions concerning what one ought to do in a situation of moral difficulty. Nevertheless, it does appear to have implications with respect to practice. This is so in that we are dealing with an image of the moral self i.e. with a self-image which makes itself felt in the context of the practice of the self-conscious agent. This provides a contrast with the image of the moral self as a 'computational', problem-solving device working from a recognition of transcendent moral principle.

In conditions of moral conflict, the agent understood in the latter sense is forced to re-interpret his position such that there is no moral problem. If one acts well, one acts well full-stop. Any broader perspective is thereby rendered illegitimate. There may, of course, be other perspectives, but these would be regarded, depending upon the particular view of political judgment one adopts, as non-political or non-consequentialist and would correspondingly be interpreted as an irrational moral response or as an irrelevant consideration.

This general picture is significantly altered if we re-cast the image of the moral self as a substantial personality-in-the-world. A picture of this sort enables us to entertain the possibility of locating moral conflicts in a realm where different demands can substantially co-exist. This becomes clearer when we think about the manner in which the focus of moral judgment is altered: we are compelled to understand moral demands in a manner which is not strictly external (and therefore inflexible) with respect to the worldly moral agent.

Where moral demands do take on an 'external',
theoretical form such that uncontested answere are required
(where one must put oneself in a position such that the
answer is obvious), to recognise a moral conflict as a
persisting problem is to behave inconsistently and to call
into question one's status as a moral agent. Thus, where
we pose the picture of a substantial moral character
against the notion of a disengaged moral self which mediates
between 'worldly' (practical) and 'unworldly' (moral)
realms, new possibilities emerge with respect to an account
of 'dirty hands'.

It is worth noting here that the role of a distinction
between public and private, understood in a moral sense,
becomes less severe, being a distinction within the world
of practical-moral agency rather than one that pertains
between the public world and the private moral self existing
prior to that world.[24] More particularly, we might identify
three areas in which the reference to the idea of a
substantive moral character alters an account of 'dirty
hands' problems (putting aside for the moment the question
of what kind of character we would wish to ascribe to the
good political agent).[25]

First, we might consider the issue of recognising
'dirty hands' problems. Essential to the possibility of
seeing such problems as real is the ability to have what
we might call a multi-perspectival view of the moral realm.
In other words, it is necessary that we should be able
simultaneously to recognise multiple 'goods'. In the case
of political action, this must involve recognising something
posed against the political demand which is neither an
external moral axiom nor an associated reference to one's
personal integrity. Where absolute references are invoked,
they demand and overarching position such that political
goods are stripped of any genuine moral content. The
ability to recognise genuine 'dirty hands' problems relies
upon the possibility of recognising multiple modes of
moral judgment with respect to action in a particular
context.

This implies the possibility of judging in a context
where one wears a variety of different 'hats'. But we must
be careful here: different hats cannot be worn simultane-
ously and the danger is therefore that the moral individual
is absorbed entirely into his roles.[26] Equally, we have
seen that the idea of placing oneself in a region where
all role-specific considerations are transcended and made
irrelevant is problematic. In the light of this, we are
compelled to recognise the relevance of a certain moral
depth and imagination.[27]

A second area in which moral character may be relevant
is in terms of a concern not simply with seeing a moral
difficulty but of being able to tolerate or come to terms
with it. This could be pursued as a psychological issue,
but it also has a relevance for questions in political
ethics. In the face of severe moral conflicts surrounding
agency, a certain conception of the moral self may imply
the cultivation of indifference. The recognition of an
irresolvable conflict, in the light of moral descriptions
grounded in absolute and exclusive demands, implies that no
decision is available to the agent and consequently that
any decision one _does_ make is morally arbitrary.

There is room for considerable doubt as to whether
this is an intelligible or feasible way in which moral
agents could conduct themselves.[28] However, one way in
which the implication of moral indifference may be vitiated
is through the narrowing of one's moral vision; somewhat
akin to blinding oneself in one eye. This is clearly
related to our previous consideration of moral recognition.
If one resorts to narrower accounts of moral justification
sufficiently frequently, one is likely to stop being able
to see the moral difficulty at all. In this sense, being
able to accept that no clear answer can be externally
prescribed, and therefore that the onus is placed back
upon the moral resources of the agent, is highly significant.

Thirdly, we need to consider the relevance of what
we have said for decision and action in the context of

moral difficulty. It is useful here to distinguish between cases of 'dirty hands' which are more or less well structured. Sometimes, the political agent may encounter a situation where political duty is fairly clear but is nevertheless morally problematic. We need to emphasise here that the moral problem does not necessarily resolve itself into a clash between duty and (moral) inclination; rather, it might be more fruitfully character- ised in terms of a contrast between a morally charged political duty and a more generally conceived notion of decency.

It might be argued that this latter formulation does not represent a significant departure from the former. Are we not still referring to a notion of personal integrity - a contextually indulgent desire on the part of the individual to be a decent person? If this is so, the initial problem is still with us: the desire for personal decency is one which, when placed in the context of possible 'dirty hands' problems, represents a non-negotiable demand which presses us to deny the persistence of the problem itself. Alternatively, however, we might view this reference to decency as a matter of moral sensitivity which enters into all moral considerations and attitudes of the substantial moral agent. In this sense, and in the context of a reference to moral character, reservations centre not upon a desire to act as a 'pure' moral self (i.e. as one would and should act independently of the specific context and its associated obligations[29]) but rather upon the commitment to retaining one's identity as a civilized moral being in the context of acting politically.

The reference to a civilized moral life may usefully be attached to an altered picture of fundamental moral demands. Where such demands are understood as rules which bear transcendently upon the pure (socially unadulterated) moral self, they have a character which is both external and absolute. We might pose against this a notion of moral standards which form an intrinsic part of a moral

character. This is not to say that moral standards
provide a solution by virtue of being readily bent or
by-passed (i.e. of having a real claim only when convenient)
but rather that as intrinsic as opposed to extrinsic
references with respect to moral perspective they can be
understood as persistent even in cases where one is forced
to ignore all or some of their implications.[30]

This serves to retrieve a distinction which, as we
noted earlier, is called into question by the Kantian
response to Machiavelli. We can, on this broad account,
find room for an intelligible distinction between making
a moral sacrifice and simply behaving badly. If we
entertain a sharp separation between absolute principle and
worldly expedience, such a distinction is hard to maintain.
On the Kantian account, ethics demands and   insists upon
the possibility of clear and instantaneous moral assessment
which necessarily ignores the question of the substantive
and temporally extended moral agent.[31] Thus, one acts
accordingly to the demands of ethics or one does not; and
if one does not, one is necessarily ignoring the moral law
(placing it out of consideration with respect to one's
practical judgments) rather than one's own moral 'well-
being'. The only cost incurred, therefore, is to ethics
itself and not to the agent.

We must also consider here cases of 'dirty hands'
which come closer to the form of a well-structured moral
dilemma. In these cases, on the broad picture we have been
considering, if a conflict is accepted as a genuine (and
persistent) conflict, no rational decision seems possible.
The exclusivity attaching to moral references prompts the
requirement for a theoretical resolution of the dilemma.
We must re-define the problem such that it is no longer a
problem. In this sense, if the problem we face is a
particularly intractable one, we are left in a position
where all that can be said to remain is the operation of
a pure will. Further, in this type of case, 'pure will'
ceases to have a moral status: moral reasoning, it seems,

ends with the recognition of an intractable dilemma and thus, as we noted earlier, the will must operate beyone the scope of any clear moral law - the practical decision will be entirely subsequent to moral reasoning and will be correspondingly arbitrary.

It is important to re-iterate that, especially in closely structured situations of this kind, the introduction of a reference to the moral character of the agent will have no direct bearing upon what decision is made. In other words, such a reference does not conjure up an added source of moral 'guidance' which can be brought into play when traditional moral references have established a dilemma.[32] Nevertheless, we can find reasons to think that a broadened account of moral personality in connection with these cases does have some bearing upon the issue. To the extent that the image of a substantial moral character is a self-image for the agent thinking and acting as a self-consciously moral being, it has a distinct bearing upon the way political agency is regarded and approached. Such an approach is founded upon the full recognition on the part of the agent that he may act badly whilst acting well.

If we insist on a substantial image of the moral personality, then the possibility of making hard political decisions does not necessarily entail the abandonment of moral self-consciousness. In highly structured cases, it is clear that deliberation over what to do for the best will often be difficult and may involve a number of different elements, some consequential, others not. The important question here, however, is what remains to be said about the moral condition of the agent. If we say simply that the agent has left the realm of morality altogether since he is no longer judging according to moral principles, then we are committed either to the view that politics, in generating these kinds of situations, is inevitably a dirty business and is therefore no place for the moral individual, or we must re-affirm the possibility of some overarching moral reference which the morally tutored agent

will recognise as indicating the correct decision. Either
way, the 'dirty hands' problem ceases to be fully
relevant.[33]

There is no reason why we should accept these
alternatives as exhausting political morality. As bearers
of substantial moral characters, individuals can entertain
the possibility of making morally difficult decisions or
deliberating in the context of a moral conflict whilst
retaining a sense of integrity. Deliberation and action
as a moral being is not always equivalent to acting
according to principles or conscience; and political
morality provides us with evidence for asserting that to
insist on an equivalence here fails to capture fully the
experience of political action.

So far, the point has been made largely in a negative
sense. In order to establish whether any concrete
advantages spring from this sort of approach, we need to
assess more positively what it entails in respect of
political agency. Clearly, from the point of view of a
theory of political morality, certain advantages emerge by
virtue of the fact that it serves to give a fuller
explanation of the relevant features of political ethics
in practice. However, since a good deal of emphasis in
the argument so far has been placed upon the way in which
particular theoretical accounts of political morality
serve to generate practical approaches which, at least in
certain contexts, become deeply undesirable, it is
necessary to establish in what ways, if any, the possibilities
we have outlined may alter the character of those practical
implications.

We might usefully introduce here the question of moral
disagreement in the light of what we have said about highly
structured cases. Putting aside the issue of large-scale
ideological disagreements, we might usefully inquire as to
whether particular moral disagreement has a place in
political decision-making. In a highly structured situation
where moral obligations conflict, deliberation concerning
the best course of action does not appear itself to have

a directly moral character. However, as we have noted, this does not necessarily imply that the moral self-consciousness of the agent falls away. And further, at certain points, moral considerations may become relevant in terms of limits. Clearly, as cases approach the structure of a highly determined tragic situation, considerations of this sort play a weaker role; however, it remains the case that in many circumstances, it is available to the agent to consider the moral cost of a certain course of action too great.

We need not be limited to viewing discernments in this context as governed exclusively by unworldly principle. It is possible to suppose the availability of intelligible distinctions which refer to the effects of particular policies in the world, taking into account contextual factors. The character and situation of one's victims may be a relevant consideration as well as one's relationship with them. Further, 'effects in the world' may have a moral as well as an instrumental character. Political agency may often have the effect of setting moral agendas and determining the qualitative character of the field within which further action is possible.

We nevertheless face a problem in that decisions made in a situation of moral conflict may still be regarded as having a moral significance only in some subjective sense - matters of moral taste take precedence. A similar point is made by Peter Winch in the context of the more general debate concerning the universalizability of moral judgments.[34] For Winch, moral theory cannot exhaust the process of substantive judgment, and that this is the case becomes clear when we consider situations where the agent faces conflicting demands. In such situations, decisions cannot be reduced to the objective demands of moral principle and are rather to be understood in terms of personal moral character.[35] Winch introduces the instructive example of Captain Vere in Melville's Billy Budd: Foretopman. When the innocent and inarticulate Billy is goaded into striking

the vindictive officer Claggart, causing his death, Vere, as captain of the ship, sees it as his duty according to naval law to condemn Billy to death. The injustice of the situation with respect to Billy is manifest but for Vere, as Captain, his duty is clear.

Winch tells us that, in the same situation, he would not have acted as Vere did: equally, however, this does not entail the absolute claim that Vere just acted wrongly. In this sense, we have to accept a subjective dimension to moral judgments in so far as one's character has a place in the formation of such judgments. As a result, the claim that moral judgments are necessarily universalizable is called into question.[36]

There is, however, a further relevant dimension to the case of Billy Budd which complicates the issue. There appear to be ways in which moral character plays more than a subjective, arbitrating role with respect to the given moral situation. This is so firstly in that the particular character of Billy Budd has a bearing upon how the situation is to be characterised. His moral innocence and his socially inarticulate demeanor afford to the situation an added and profound moral difficulty. At the same time, equally, the character of Vere is relevant in so far as it introduces the question of moral flexibility and change. We are told at the outset that Vere, whose seriousness and integrity are beyond question, is nevertheless a "dry and bookish" man.[37] He is given to aloofness and manifests a lack of attention to particular circumstances or to the particular natures of those with whom he is dealing.[38] Although Vere could not be described simply as a 'rule-book' man, there is an abstract dimension to his character which manifests itself in his approach to his command (he is a man of "rigid decision"[39]) which is placed under pressure by the case of Billy Budd.

Vere's intrinsic impulse is to act according to impersonal duty and he urges the drumhead court to attend only to the deed itself.[40] Clearly, however, he is aware of

a moral dimension to the case which cannot be incorporated simply into a reference to the isolated deed: and indeed, even on his deathbed he utters Billy's name. In this sense, Vere experiences a situation with attendant responsibilities which press hard upon his moral perspective and point toward a broader vision.

The sort of moral change that is suggested here is clearly not to be understood as some sort of 'conversion' or the recognition of any logical error. Rather, we are made aware of the sense in which experience may inculcate a broader moral character - a greater openness of disposition. A 'wiser' Vere may not have come to a different decision - and we are told that even when Vere recites Billy's name with his dying breath, he does so without remorse.[41] This indicates that Vere does not regard himself as having acted badly - as having made the wrong moral decision. Nevertheless, the effects of the experience in relation to the character of Vere are suggestive of the need for an altered perception of his moral position and the costs of the decisions he has to make. This could clearly be relevant for future actions, perceptions and approaches to moral situations. We are given good reason to think that, although we cannot condemn Vere on the grounds of his bare decision, he did not handle the situation as well as he could have done. This relates to the essence of his original moral outlook; an outlook which appears to encapsulate a sharp distinction between public and private. It is in the light of this that we can understand the rigid and, on occasions, hasty nature of his decision-making. Vere can find no place for his (private) moral self and the case of Billy Budd tests this perspective in an extreme manner. It is significant here, however, that the test Vere faces does not entail the demand that he recognise his decision as the wrong one; but it nevertheless seems to suggest some transformation in his outlook.

When we consider moral character more generally in relation to politics, two important implications follow. First, it appears that action in the context of moral

conflict or difficulty places a particular sort of burden
upon the agent. And we cannot fully accommodate the depth
and significance of this without allowing a place for
substantive moral character in our account of agency.
Second, we can identify ways in which moral change is
effected or suggested by the experience of these kinds of
pratical imperatives. And the process of learning which
the agent may undergo cannot be explained simply in terms
of rational cognition.[42]

This second point has implications for the question
of subjectivity. It is certainly true that a reference to
moral character in decision-making implies a move away from
the 'objective' universality demanded by an exhaustive moral
theory. However, the fact that we can assert the possibility
of learning through experience and of moral change implies
that there is more to the issue than a reference to an
ultimate subjectivity. Winch does suggest that there are
ways in which we can legitimately aim at limiting the
subjectivity of judgments such that, although subjective,
they are not merely capricious: we can demand consistency
in judgment and we can also expect of the agent a sensitivity
to the moral issue and an understanding of moral terms.[43]
These act as justifiable limits upon subjectivity, but to
the extent that moral disposition is relevant to the
circumstances of judgment, we cannot demand the objectivity
solicited by the universalizability thesis.

However, the fact that moral dispositions may display
an openness through the encounter between moral character
and the world (including other moral characters) suggests
a sense in which judgments entail at least the hope of
agreement. In this sense, the possibility of moral change
is related to the possibility of moral integration.

We have to be careful about the sense of 'integration'
here. The crux of the demands made upon the moral agent is
not the demand for agreement specified by transcendent
ethics. On this latter view, the strength of such a demand
seems to entail that the sort of moral change we have

described is effectively rendered redundant. Rather, in
the light of the 'loosening' of universal demands prompted
by a reference to moral character, we need to recognise the
sense in which moral perspectives and resources are extended
and deepened through testing encounters with the political
world. The emphasis, then, is not upon a change in moral
beliefs or principles in accordance with what is socially
required but rather upon the character of the agent as a
'worldly' moral being.[44]

These general remarks apply to moral life as a whole
and become important where moral conflict is generated in
practical situations. But that they manifest a particular
significance with respect to political morality reflects
the peculiarly problematic nature of political agency where
'dirty hands' problems are deeply inscribed and where such
problems have a particularly sharp and portentous character.
Further, the manner in which an account involving the moral
character of agents appears to render the most problematic
dimensions to politics intelligible and theoretically
tolerable has implications for politics itself as an
activity.

We can take this further by the introduction of
another example. Sophocles' Antigone presents us with a
particularly tragic moral conflict which has implications
for a view of political authority and obligation. The moral
situation involved is a highly structured and inscribed
one. Antigone is faced with the problem of fulfilling her
familial duty toward her dead brother, Polynices, by giving
him a proper burial when Polynices, having opposed the state,
has been denied a burial on the orders of the King. Thus,
she faces a conflict that is not of her own making. Equally,
Creon, the King feels his highest duty to inhere in the
demands of the state and its customs in the face of betrayal.
The moral tragedy is thus inscribed is his situation as well.
Thus, we can follow Hollis in denying that those concerned
were brought down "...by an arrogance born of moral
failings".[45]

At the same time, individual agency does not thereby

fall out of account - Hollis also notes that both Creon and Antigone <u>choose</u> the paths they take.[46] And to this extent, moral character is not irrelevant. This becomes evident when we focus on Creon. His situation is slightly less determined than is that of Antigone (who must betray her brother or disobey her sovereign) and the room for manoever with respect to the way in which he handles the situation is correspondingly greater. It is partly in this sense that the drama is politically interesting. Emphasising this dimension to the case does not necessarily lead us toward an explanation of ways in which tragedy could have been avoided - it is central to Sophocles' point that it could not. However, what follows from it and how it issues out for the individuals involved does not, on inspection, appear unrelated to the question of character.

Creon rules Thebes with a strong sense of the duties which follow from his position and of the demand that the well-being of the state is paramount. In addition to this, he displays an equally strong sense of his own relation to this task. Rule presents a challenge for the individual and it is a challenge which Creon is determined to face up to with vigour and moral purity (which is not unrelated to the fact that the culture he inhabits stresses that one who occupies the role of King does not do so contingently but is actually chosen by the gods). Attendant upon this are certain crucial features which inform Creon's general perspective. He regards himself as possessing a dominance in respect of the moral situations he encounters - he claims a monopoly of judgment, refusing genuinely to recognise pluraties of perspective or the possibilities of advice and of learning which such pluralities might entail. When faced with judgments and actions which conflict with his own commitments, Creon consistently explains them by reference to moral failings; the burial of Polynices can only have been carried out for <u>money</u> (which "...tempts and deludes the most well-meaning soul..."[47]) on the instigation of malcontents.[48]

In this way, Creon displays a narrowness of outlook which plays an important role in the way the situation

develops. This is particularly significant in relation to
his role as a politician. The ways in which his encounters
with those around him become attenuated is reproduced in his
relation with the people as a whole. When he is warned that
the people are sympathetic to Antigone's cause, he cannot
accept the fact. For Creon, the moral agreement of the
people is assumed and therefore occupies no place in his
assessment of the difficulty of the situation. (In fact,
on Creon's view, there is no difficulty).

It remains the case that Creon is a man of considerable
commitment and that his political claims are not ill-founded.
However, even though we cannot reasonably doubt the moral
legitimacy of Creon's position, problems emerge in respect
of the way in which he formulates the moral claims he makes
and of his relationship to those claims. His approach
demands an absolutism which serves to separate him from the
community within which he has to act. It is left to the
prophet Teiresias to confront Creon with his errors and to
tell him that "Only a fool is governed by self-will"[49] And
once again in the face of disagreement, Creon suspects low
personal motives. However, the wisdom of the prophet's
remarks is evidenced in the increasingly defensive and
hysterical encounters between Creon and those around him -
encounters which have consistently fatal consequences.
Creon prides himself on his moral strength, but it is
revealed to be strength bought at the price of the maturity
that is crucial for the political agent. It is only
through the horrific unfolding of events that Creon is
led to regret his "stubborn will" and to "learn in sorrow".[50]

Of course, Antigone seems no less uncompromising:
worldly justice must always bend before divine law and it
is a point of personal honour that she buries her brother.[51]
However, the fact that her position is not like that of
Creon means that the implications of her stand are different.
Antigone's position is not unproblematic, but the political
nature of Creon's position implies that more turns immediately
upon his approach. Early in the play, Creon remarks that

> No other touchstone can test the heart
> of a man,
> The temper of his mind and spirit, till
> he be tried
> In the practice of authority and rule.[52]

It is a claim which proves tragically accurate in what
follows. In this sense, there are dimensions to political
agency which place particular sorts of demands upon the
agent and which highlight relationships between moral
character, action and outcomes.

It is worth noting that there may be a problem here
with respect to interpretation. For the modern reader,
the emphasis placed upon fate and divine destiny by Sophocles
does not have the force it presumably would have had in his
own time. On the Sophoclean perspective, all elements in
the tragedy, including Creon's moral character may be
understood as part of the tragic fate which afflicts the
family of Oedipus. However, the details of the case remain
instructive. In addition, we must avoid too ready an
assimilation of one example to another. There are clear and
considerable differences between the cases of Creon and that
of Captain Vere. Not only are the political and cultural
contexts vastly dissimilar but there is also a difference
between the ways in which Creon and Vere regard their moral
commitments and between the manner in which each relates to
his role. What does seem to be common to the two cases is
that both conceive of their moral position in ways which
serve to limit their perspectives and their judgments. Each
is, in his own way aloof from the situations surrounding him
and is correspondingly faced with severe problems in practice.

In this sense, we can draw conclusions concerning the
character of political judgment and agency which are relevant
to the moral question. To the extent that politics can
never be a lone pursuit, political ethics is inadequately
understood in terms of a pure and abstracted moral self.
Individualised moral attitudes which may be adopted in other
contexts are put under particular pressure in a political
situation: In politics, questions of openness of disposition

and constructive communication necessarily become pressing. There is a sense, then, in which a form of moral 'selflessness' is invited by political engagement.

These features appear as intrinsic to the concept of public action. As we have noted, public life generates special features which bear upon the agent and responses to these features are crucial. To understand one's moral duty in terms of a strict public-private distinction may result in an attenuated conception of political ethics in so far as such an understanding may imply a problematic 'distance' between the moral individual and the duties generated by the situations in which that individual acts.[53]

We need to relate what we have said on the basis of these examples to the more general discussion of preceding chapters. Again, some care needs to be taken: Creon displays a moral inflexibility and absolutism but he is clearly not a moral absolutist in a _modern_ sense. In other words, he does not operate with an intellectualized self-image defining his moral perspective. As we have seen, Creon does recognise the significance of moral character with respect to the burdens of political office – but he nevertheless displays a proud self-will which renders the reference to moral character fruitless in practice.

The chief contrast lies in the intellectual context, the range of moral perspectives and descriptions which define the moral self-conception of agents. The question of the role of moral character in politics is a persistent one: but in the context of certain theoretical pictures of the moral life, the problem is magnified. Where moral theories (and more generally the moral culture that they express) generate a practical self-conception on the part of agents which institutionalizes or instantiates a problematically narrow approach, this is particulary so.

We are now in a position to pursue this general argument with respect to acutely problematic contexts in modern politics. It is through attention to this sort of

context that the implications of certain perspectives
are magnified in practice. Equally, we shall be able
to pursue the theme of moral character and identity in
a broader context and to identify ways in which problems
of political ethics in severe circumstances may admit of
a constructive response.

Notes

1. We can relate this to Kant's denial of the right to
    rebellion. The legitimacy of political authority is
    established through formal principles which connect
    public institutions with the universal will of all.
    To pose alternative claims against public authority
    is therefore, by definition, to pose particular claims
    against universal ones - and this can have no moral
    basis.
    Arendt notes that on this view revolution can only
    ever be understood on the model of a coup d'état.
    see H.Arendt (1982) p.60

2. The term 'private' here needs to be qualified by the
    recognition that, for Kant, private moral life is
    itself a realm of agreement on the basis of rational
    principle. In this sense, the public-private
    distinction is generally weakened in Kant.

3. T.Nagel (1978) p.82

4. ibid

5. ibid p.89

6. ibid p.85

7. As D.F.Thompson notes, Kant's criterion of publicity
    does not demand that political decisions or policies
    actually be made public. They only need to be in
    principle publicizable. This, nevertheless, has a
    limited applicability with respect to political policy.
    And further, it is a criterion which has an abstract
    form such that universal agreement could be assumed on
    the basis of a distinction between the actual and
    rational judgments of individuals.

8. M.Hollis (1982)

9. ibid p.393

10. ibid p.397 - This indicates the sense in which the moral
    tension is internal to the practice of public office-
    holders.
    cf D.Miller (1984) : Miller notes that the threat of
    violence at the disposal of the state may sometimes
    necessarily be accompanied by an apparent condemnation
    of _all_ violence.

11. M.Hollis (1982) p.393

12. Clearly, this raises the question of the moral basis
    of agency, of how we can establish a way in which moral

resources may facilitate sensitivity to moral difficulty without resorting to conscience or abstract theory. The later part of this chapter will address this issue more directly.

13. The King's role is similar to Hill's in that it breaches the divide between political and military responsibility. However, a distinction can be drawn in that whereas Hill's job could have been separated into two roles, the role of the King is necessarily unitary.

14. This does not mean that in all situations a reference to moral sensitivity makes a difference to what is done. However, the perspective which one has upon one's actions and their moral repercussions is significant for an affirmation of the depth of 'dirty hands' problems and may further imply something for limits upon agency in some cases.

15. B.Williams (1978)

16. ibid p.64

17. This latter problem does not thereby necessarily go away; Williams notes that politics may involve keeping on oneself in power and therefore that questions relating to public and private morality may, at certain points, lapse in favour of questions which pose politics against morality. ibid p.57

18. Such considerations have the effect of bringing 'internal' and 'external' limits increasingly close together.

19. If it were, we may be tempted once again to widen the gap between public and private considerations such that, in politics, the agent is required to become a thorough consequentialist, abstracting away from one's moral personality.

20. B.Williams (1965)

21. ibid p.111

22. see M.Walzer (1973)

23. There is no particular reason why the familiar claim that 'this will hurt me more than it will hurt you' should be more satisfactory coming from a political agent than it does coming from anyone else.

24. In this sense, Nagel's claim that public and private
    morality share a common context is in general terms a
    constructive one. As we noted, however, the idea of
    their separate derivability from a common, generalized
    moral source creates difficulties. It is far from clear
    that an ultimate set of values could be said to exhaust
    our stock of available moral descriptions. Such
    descriptions, in relation to actions, situations and
    most notably, to individuals manifest a specificity
    which resists the idea of a generalized, specifiable
    foundation.

25. As will become clear, these areas are closely related
    to one another and are therefore isolated only through
    a process of abstracting from the practice of moral
    thought and action.

26. cf G.A.Cohen (1966) Cohen affirms a necessary
    'distance' between individuals and roles through the
    logical distinction between roles and beliefs.

27. Interesting treatments of the role of imagination in
    moral life, albeit in   very different intellectual
    contexts, are to be found in I.Murdoch (1970) and
    S.Lovibond (1983).

28. Again, we have to be mindful of the relation between
    theory and practice. Attenuated pictures of moral
    conduct may nevertheless have implications for practice
    in so far as they might enter into the perspective of
    the self-conscious moral agent.

29. cf M.Hollis (1982)

30. The distinction between 'rules' and 'standards' here is
    meant to illustrate a point of ethical emphasis. It
    could reasonably be argued that a conception of rules
    as constitutive elements in human practice rather than
    legalistic stipulations may render 'rules' more
    suitable in this context than 'standards'. The latter
    could be understood both as 'external' to the agent and
    as exclusive in their demands. The central point,
    however, is a general one concerning the possibility of
    affording a place to general moral references within
    the constitution of a contextualised moral being.

31. These themes are pursued in an interesting way in I.Murdoch (1970)

32. This claim would imply that moral decisions in such situations are, after all, _easily_ made when we grasp fully the process of moral deliberation. Rather, we need to emphasise the sense in which an account of political morality must incorporate or tolerate the possibility of severe moral difficulty.

33. As I have attempted to show in the previous chapter, these two views may not be entirely separate, at least where ethical theory is put to the test by the demands of practical politics.

34. P.Winch (1972)

35. ibid p.159

36. ibid p.163

37. H.Melville p.251

38. ibid p.252

39. ibid p.296

40. ibid p.301

41. ibid p.325

42. A similar view is expressed in Michael Oakeshott's distinction between the sort of moral outlook which would specify an education that is 'compulsary' and one implying an education that is simply 'inevitable' M.Oakeshott (1962) p.67.

43. P.Winch (1972) p.166

44. Questions could be framed here concerning the relationship between moral identity and social existence - questions which traditionally raise issues of totalitarianism and moral freedom. We shall have reason to attend to these questions more fully later on.

45. M.Hollis (1987) p.208

46. ibid

47. Sophocles p.134

48. The theme of pecuniary corruption is raised by Creon repeatedly in situations of opposition, criticism and even, as with the messenger who tells him of the burial of Polynices, when he receives bad news. ibid p.135.

49. Sophocles p.153

50. ibid p.160

51. It is revealing that when her sister Ismene claims
    that she too is guilty, Antigone denies this with the
    words -

    That is not just. You would not lend a hand

                                                    ibid p.141

    The ambiguity of this statement suggests the
    possibility of a certain pride on Antigone's part
    Nevertheless, Antigone _is_ aware of the general moral
    problem inherent in her situation and is prepared,
    from the outset, to die for her actions.

52. ibid p.131

53. The 'distance' involved here constantly demands to be
    bridged; and this can be achieved from these premisses
    only through the translation of a pure, individual
    moral standpoint into political terms. And, as we have
    seen, this can have ominous consequences.

    For an extended examination of 'moral purity' and the
    dangers it may pose to politics, with reference to
    Billy Budd, see P.Johnson (1988) Ch.8

V : Virtue and Moral Character

Before moving to a direct consideration of modern
political agency and ideological conflict, we may usefully
expand upon the approach outlined in the previous chapter.
In order to do this, we must attend to two remaining issues.
First, we must raise again a question we put aside in the
course of the previous discussion; we must consider what kind
of moral character is to be demanded or expected of good
political agents. This question demands attention in the
context of a wider discussion of the idea of moral
character itself and its relation with social action.
Second, more generally, we must attempt to identify the
main features which would characterise a picture of the
moral life that includes those aspects we have emphasised as
central to a constructive understanding of political ethics.

We noted, in the previous chapter, the sense in which
a recognition of persons as bearers of a substantial moral
character allows for a deeper grasp upon 'dirty hands'
problems and their persistent place in the moral perceptions
of agents. A correlate of this claim proved to be the idea
of character as a repository of moral sensitivity and a
broadly conceived sense of moral integrity in the face of
hard political decisions. It seems however that we may have
to relate this possibility to more substantive claims
concerning the appropriate kind of moral character, or set
of moral dispositions, which the agent displays.

There are the beginnings of a difficulty here. On the
one hand we have been emphasising the way in which
character may be included in the general picture of moral
agency and how our responses to certain sorts of moral
difficulty are thereby altered. On the other hand, at the
same time, something more seems to be implied. The
possibility of resisting brutalization in politics appears
to rest upon the development of a specific sort of moral
character which we ought therefore recommend as suitable in
relation to 'humane' political conduct. There is clearly
a considerable difference between these two ways of

proceeding and the first appears to imply nothing in
itself about the second.

In the light of this, we need to look in greater detail
at what might be entailed with respect to substantive claims
concerning moral character. What sort of specification
would establish the grounds for moral sensitivity and
suitably broad modes of judgment in politics? It is hard
to see immediately what sort of answer could be given here:
and we need therefore to consider first what we mean by moral
character.

When we talk about the moral character of an individual,
we might be understood to be invoking a particular, perhaps
complex, set of dispositions which embody a description of
the way in which that individual characteristically conducts
himself in a wide range of possible situations. However, the
notion of disposition is one which needs to be approached
with caution. When introduced in this context, a disposit-
ional account serves to bring our view of the moral life
more closely into line with general accounts in the
philosophy of mind.[1] Further, however, we need to be aware
of the sense in which accounts of this sort carry with them
dangers of behaviourism.

When pressed, dispositional accounts may resolve
themselves into descriptions of mental events or states
which render those events and states ultimately reducible
to overt, behavioural features. There are clearly
difficulties with this sort of account: it fails adequately
to account for the role of references to mental states as
explanations of behaviour.[2] Equally, questions of the
privileged access afforded to subjects with respect to
mental states are eroded.[3] This general danger with the
reference to dispositions has repurcussions in the more
limited context of an understanding of moral character.
When mentioning moral dispositions in this context we may
not be demanding that the notion of 'disposition' bears the
same degree of explanatory weight as it does in a
comprehensive theory of mind. However, the perceived

relationship between dispositions and observable behaviour
may lead us to specification of moral character in terms of
a determinate set of practical propensities (or perhaps
habits) which describes the agent and which is open to
assessment.

There are two difficulties here; one general and the
other more particularly related to the context of political
agency. First, we are in danger of arriving at too highly
circumscribed a view of the character of moral agents.
Certainly, a dispositional account represents a step forward
from the pure moral assessment of actions which leaves the
agent in a realm of absolute freedom of choics and which
therefore renders assertions concerning substantial,
temporally enduring character inappropriate. (Particular
actions, on this account, can be exhaustively assessed
independent of all considerations of character and of
patterns of agency). However the fact that we _can_ make
claims concerning the moral propensities of individuals,
built upon patterns of agency which develop over time in a
wide range of practical situations, does not necessarily
imply that moral character is thereby susceptible to
exhaustive description. In this sense, there is a
distinction between the moral agent who is the bearer of
a discernible moral character and one whose moral conduct
is constituted by a series of determinate and habitualized
procedures.

Understood in the latter sense, the capacity of the
moral agent to respond to new and challenging moral
situations is hard to incorporate. Equally, we can refer to
modes of moral change and progress which cannot strictly be
correlated with readily specifiable transformations in
behavioural dispositions.[4] These features of the moral life,
which prompt an emphasis upon the 'inner' moral resources of
the agent, are relevant to political action.

Strictly circumscribed accounts of moral characteristics
imply an image of the agent which establishes narrow,
habitualized terms for moral conduct. Attention to
circumstances and the consequent demand for adaptability

is underemphasised. In the light of this, when we re-
consider the question of what specific moral character
political agents ought to have, we must be circumspect
in formulating a response. Given the necessity for
flexibility and a broadness of vision on the part of
political agents, any circumscribed substantive specification
of moral character is likely to act as an inappropriate
limit upon political practice.[5] And in this sense, we may
substitute the non-substantive requirement that political
agents display a moral character which embodies a broad moral
sensitivity.

This is not to be understood in terms of a complete
indeterminacy in moral judgment, which would be equivalent
to having no moral character at all.[6] What it does seem to
require is the capacity to entertain a multiplicity of
compelling moral demands and to retain a sense of moral
responsibility in the face of political decision-making.

This raises the further important question of the
self-conscious relationship between oneself and one's moral
judgments. And at the same time we must consider the
significance of general accounts of the moral life which
include references to enduring moral character. We can
best pursue these two related issues by looking briefly
back to the examples of political and moral judgments
introduced in the previous chapter.

We noted the sense in which both Creon and Vere
display a certain 'narrowness' of judgment - but at the
same time, we saw that there are deep, discernible differences
between their respective approaches and self-conceptions.
A central point of difference between the two itself concerns
the perceived role of character in politics. As we noted,
Creon regards politics as the ultimate test of a man's
character and hence as a pursuit which makes severe demands
upon the moral resources of the agent. Vere's perspective
is somewhat different: his implicit sharp distinction
between public and private leads him to put a substantial
part of his character as a moral individual out of consider-
ation.

These broad differences in approach (which are not, of course, unrelated to the intellectual and cultural context in which each is located) have implications for the practical approach each adopts and the part their respective characters play in the two dramas. And there is one sense in which Creon and Vere reveal themselves here to be polar opposites. Creon identifies wholly with his role as a bearer of political authority. In this way, when faced with the situations of conflict he fails to distinguish between disagreements stemming from moral multiplicity and personal affronts to his own dignity as a ruler. He states his determination with respect to the case of Antigone with these words:

> I hold to the law,
> And will never betray it - least of
> all for a woman
> Better be beaten, if need be, by
> a man,
> Than let a woman get the better of us[7]

The issue becomes a personal one for Creon and it is a matter of pride that he does not compromise. When his son, Haemon urges him to consider the significance of Antigone's claims, Creon brands him a "despicable coward" with "no more will than a woman".[8] There is no place in Creon's moral approach for what we termed 'moral selflessness' - his judgments are a source of pride.

In contrast, Vere appears peculiarly distanced from his role. Remote from the world in which he judges and acts, his public persona is attenuated and his moral individuality is obscured. He admits, with respect to the case of Billy Budd, that

> ...the exceptional in the matter moves
> the heart within you. Even so too is
> mine moved.[9]

However he maintains a strict public ethic:

> The heart is the feminine in man and
> hard though it be, she must here be
> ruled out.[10]

It is an ethic, however, which is challenged by the case of Billy Budd - and the propensity on the part of Vere to suppress his own moral personality (which thereby becomes a source of danger for him), becoming a thorough public man, is called into question.

Thus, both Creon and Vere display a problematic perception of the relation in which they stand to their tasks. But they are nevertheless rather different perspectives and further, are perspectives which we might trace back to the particular character each manifests. The crucial question here is whether we can draw any more general conclusion from this than simply that Creon and Vere both had moral characters which proved somewhat inadequate to their practical political roles and that the issue remains on the level of the idiosyncratic.

If we understand the moral character of an individual as a flexible set of dispositions, attitudes and resources which find application in practice, we can suppose that included in this general conflux will be a significant moral self-conception - a formative understanding of what it is to be a moral (and political) agent. Such a self-conception will be of considerable importance in so far as it may act as an internal criterion for the development and application of specific sorts of moral perceptions and resources. As such, it may equally act as an internal limitation upon this application.

In the cases of Creon and Vere, their particular self-conceptions do indeed appear to limit their perceptions and the forms of moral awareness available to them. Thus, in the light of what we have already said concerning the openness of disposition which is appropriate to the demands of political agency, the role of particular self-conceptions appears crucial. Furthermore, such self-conceptions are not entirely independent of the available theoretical or cultural pictures of moral agency which will form an intrinsic part of any general intellectual context.

The implicit move here is from questions of more or less limited moral characters in themselves to questions of intellectual pictures which say something about the role of character itself. We must recognise the sense in which individual characters develop necessarily in the context of the range of assumptions, conventions and shared conceptions which make up general culture. This suggests that such

pictures can enter into the characteristic practices and
approaches of persons in terms of a general outlook or
perspective. What people understand to be available to
them as moral beings is relevant here.

This proves significant when we reflect upon the fact
that one crucial difference between the cases of Creon and
Vere is that the latter's problems have more of an intellect-
ual origin than do those of the former. Further, Vere
operates in a modern context and the modern world is one
which is peculiarly attached to theory. The supposition that
theory can provide us with exhaustive accounts of human
existence (including that of ethics) - a supposition we found
to be prominent, in different ways, in the work of Kant and
of Mill leads toward a perspective where theory is dominant
with respect to practice.[11]

There may be contexts in which the general ethical
images serve to limit the ways in which agents approach
their tasks and the situations they are in. This is so
especially in so far as a moral culture may frequently
include features which resolve themselves into elements of
a reflective and prescriptive theory of moral conduct.[12]
In previous chapters, we have seen how certain moral
theories generate accounts of judgment and action which
precisely serve to limit the relevance of moral character
in politics and which, as a consequence, imply problematic
practical approaches.

However, if we wish to pose against the resulting
accounts of political ethics one which gives prominence to
moral character (and the possibilities therein) the question
remains as to the context we can give to this alternative
in terms of a general picture of moral life. We already
have certain indications of how we might proceed here by
virtue of the suggestions implicit in the criticism of
Kant and of Utilitarianism.

There may be a problem, however, with the citing of
moral character as the essence of a distinction between
different ethical pictures here. Judith Shklar notes that

Kant _was_ concerned with character and the cultivation of
particular dispositions because few of us are really in a
position to exercise truly free, rational judgment. As a
result, instead, we must imitate the fully dutiful individual
through the cultivation of good moral habits.[13] However, there
remain features of Kant's general approach which distinguish
it from those which might raise the issue of character in a
more central way.

It remains the case that character is, for Kant, a
secondary moral concept and, further, that it is relevant
only in terms of habituation: in this sense, morality
retains a legalistic form.[14]   To give prominence
to the idea of character in ethics in more than a
behaviouristic sense requires a general picture which
entails more than the observance of moral rules.

The central distinction here is between a view of
moral demands as 'external' ideal references which fill the
role of a measuring rod applied to conduct and a view
stressing the 'inner' resources of individuals which we are
able to discern and express in the form of complex, extended
character descriptions. This approach to understanding the
moral life (and the possibilities inherent in our moral
language) is pursued by Iris Murdoch in contrast with what
she terms the "current view" - the latter being the broadly
conceived project of modern moral philosophy which focusses
upon rational rule-based prescriptions as the foundation of
moral judgment.[15] Murdoch wishes to emphasise the

> ...personal attitudes and visions
> which do not obviously take the
> form of choice-guiding arguments.[16]

and which are

> ...an important part of what, in
> the ordinary sense, a person is
> like.[17]

If we take these dimensions to our actual moral judgments
and descriptions, certain established moral theories may
prove inadequate when measured against the spectrum of our
real experience.

If we understand ethics in terms which specify
universal and openly defensible rules of conduct (defensible,

that is, by exhaustive rational arguments) certain aspects of what is to be a moral individual fall out of account. Particularly, the practical agent becomes a highly attenuated figure. We encounter the moral individual as a contextualised agent, with a combination of factual descriptions and a determinate set of generalised rules or values at his disposal, as a pure decision-making will susceptible to guidance by the available arguments. In this sense, the agent appears both as 'transparent' and free from the influences of personal history, prejudice and any 'inner conflict'.[18] We might recall here Kant's strict distinction between pure will and hypothetical judgment, the latter being encumbered by particularity. Personal history (or character) is not thereby denied any relevance - but its role is rendered contingent and it cannot (or ought not) to have any compelling force in the moral context. Equally, Mill emphasises the irrelevance of any form of established convention for ethical life, such that to take received conventions as serious moral determinants must constitute a form of abdication of responsibility.[19]

As we have noted, a broad ethical approach which establishes the moral agent as a pure free will has profound implications for acting in the context of conflicting obligations and for the burdens associated with 'dirty hands' problems. To this extent, we can lend some credence to Murdoch's claim that

> The insistence that morality is
> essentially rules may be seen as
> an attempt to secure us against the
> ambiguity of the world.[20]

It is precisely the ambiguity inherent in situations of moral conflict which generates the special demands associated with contextualised social action such as that involved in politics. In so far as moral theories press us toward the demand for clear and absolutely defensible arguments (associated with criteria which presume to specify any particular action as simply right or wrong) they render the available ways of facing such difficulties increasingly problematic.

It may be the case that the approach we have described can still allow for the possibility of conflict. However, as we have already seen, acting in a situation of conflict or ambiguity requires, from a moral point of view, a particular sort of negation of that ambiguity. If decision and action are to retain a genuine moral significance, there must be some sense in which competing moral demands lose their application (otherwise, no _moral_ decision is available). It is in this way, in particular contexts that we arrive at a strict dichotomy which poses pure moral standards against expedient politics.

We have seen that this is an intellectual context in which fanatic and possible brutalized political conduct gains a foothold. The relationship between ethics and certainty is clearly a significant one here. Where the moral individual is understood as a will under the guidance of absolute and general moral demands, genuine moral decision implies a certainty not just that what one is doing is right but also that it is exclusively so - that it gains value from a general demand which cannot logically co-exist in any particular situation with contrary principles.

A picture of which vitiates these difficulties must include in its structure a more substantial notion of moral being which admits of positive moral characterisations. The approach suggested by Murdoch, which emphasises enduring moral character prompts us toward a view of moral perspectives as intrinsic and positive with respect to the individual agent.[21] Most commonly, when we attempt to characterise individuals in this way (rather than confining ourselves to the disengaged assessment of particular actions) we turn to the language of virtue.

When we consider the moral life in terms of virtue, we introduce moral predicates the significance of which extends further than a simple tally of right and wrong actions. This has two important consequences. First, the moral identity of the individual ceases to depend entirely upon an adherence

to absolute and essentially exclusive moral demands. In
other words, the possibility of entertaining genuine moral
multiplicities bearing upon the situated individual does
not present the same danger to the moral self-conception of
that individual. This has constructive implications for a
consideration of 'dirty hands' problems in practice.

Second, with respect to the available judgments we
might apply to agents (and which agents may apply to them-
selves), an emphasis upon the context provided by the
substantial, temporal character of the agent, the
possibilities are broadened and are rendered less 'one-
dimensional'. When individuals act in situations of moral
conflict, the introduction of questions of general moral
character allow us to formulate a fuller and deeper
assessment of possible mitigations. Whether 'excuses' for
morally doubtful acts have any genuine claim upon us may
turn to a large extent upon our more general assessments
of the agent concerned.[22]

This latter point applies in a variety of contexts. It
may apply to personal events relevant to the moral progress
of an individual. Equally, however, it has an application
to public action. We can usefully borrow an example from
Shklar here. She notes that Robert E. Lee chose to
fight for the South (his home) in the American Civil War
rather than for the North, whose cause he believed in and
whose commanders were his friends and colleagues (he was
even offered the leadership of the Union forces by his
former commander Winfield Scott). The fact remains that
Lee has been consistently, and fairly universally, regarded
as a man of considerable courage and virtue;

> ...because we cannot help recognising
> the human tragedy of such a man, with
> his knowledge of the consequences of
> his acts...it is not creed but character
> that raises treachery out of its usual
> depth.[23]

For Shklar, the case of Lee contrasts with others whose
treachery, albeit supported by comprehensible and more or
less compelling reasons, is less well regarded when put
into the context of their general character.[24]

Distinctions of this sort are facilitated and made
accessible through the ascription of virtue to moral
agents.[25] When one acts, we may understand the agent as
bringing to that act a weight of personal history and
substantial moral character which demands our attention in
the process of assessment. The same point can equally be
made from the perspective of the judgments of agents
themselves.

In a context where agents understand their own moral
lives as patterns of positive characteristics and resources
which are brought to bear in practical situations, questions
of ethical consistency, judgment and justification are
potentially transformed. Central to this is the moral
self-conception of the agent and the attendant understanding
of what it is to act well (to preserve one's integrity).
A moral situation is, for the agent, a situation in which
he is necessarily _engaged_. In this sense, it is a situation
for the agent and is generated (_as_ a practical, moral
situation) in and through the self-conscious relations
between the agent, factors which constitute the context
(including other agents) and the obligations involved. Where
moral demands are understood as extrinsic sets of rules (or
the true moral essence of the ideal, a priori human being)
those demands specify judgments which are applied to
independently framed factual situations. And this equally
has implications for the place of the moral self. The self
as a source of practical judgments is equally external to
the situation, assessing its structure and then invoking
the criteria for the application of the appropriate moral
rules.

There is an implicit question of the relation between
fact and value here. Where the moral agent is abstracted
from factual (universal, objective, exhaustively describable)
situations, the resultant moral ascriptions must be independ-
ent of any possible factually described situations - i.e.
nothing evaluative is implied by such situations in
themselves. Taken in itself, however, the distinction

between facts and values has the character of an assumption rather than as a clearly demonstrable or self-evident necessity.[26]

There appear to be situations where the facts of the matter have a moral bearing upon the agents involved. This is particularly apparent where we shift the focus of attention from the imperatives generated by abstract moral rules to questions of obligation and commitment.[27] It is in situations of this sort that it becomes increasingly difficult to disentangle the moral agent as a disinterested source of judgment from the moral situation itself such that universal and general rules satisfy the moral responsibilities involved. We can recall here the sense in which different roles create for agents special, non-universalized obligations.

As substantial moral characters, the moral perceptions of individuals develop in a situated manner. And in this sense, judgments have an origin which cannot be abstracted from the situations in which they are made and the self, as the origin of these judgments, is subject to those immediate demands the situation specifies. There is a sense, then, in which the possibilities we have already noted of adopting a broader moral perspective (recognising multiplicity and complications), which is implied by a positive notion of moral character, relate equally to the supposition of a more immediate and integrated relation between agents and their situations. Where moral demands and perceptions are generated in concrete situations, we have to recognise the sense in which situations of moral conflict and difficulty present real burdens for the agent - burdens which cannot be shed through a de-situated reference to abstract rules or ideals.

This particular mode of responsibility, with the attendant demands for moral flexibility and, in certain cases, for what we have previously referred to as 'moral selflessness' contrast with self-conscious procedures which focus upon moral purity and dogmatism. There is a sense in

which moral judgment and agency invites a particular form of pride. Alcibiades betrayed Athens on the grounds that a 'true patriot' opposes his city when it becomes bad or corrupt. In fact, the only significant change that Athens had undergone was its decision to condemn Alcibiades himself.[28] Thus, Alcibiades' moral judgments were formulated by reference to himself as the necessary standard of rectitude. His fault lay in his moral pride: but it is equally a self-referential notion which may make itself felt more generally in relation to moral self-images that inculcate the demand for abstract certainty.[29]

If we thus draw out a connection between the exercise of attenuated moral resources with the adoption of certain generalised ethical images, the question re-emerges as to the relation between theory and the world (as does the related question of the relative assessment of general ethical accounts). Any theoretical account which merits our serious attention must have some foundation in the way we conduct ourselves in the world. In this sense, philosophical disputes will in part be disputes over how best to understand and elucidate actual practice. However, we have been looking at a particular modern ethical picture partly with an eye to tackling what might be understood to be its undesirable consequences in certain practical contexts. And if we wish to consider an account with reference to its actual practical implications, it is hard to see how we can readily, at the same time, dispense with that account in favour of some alternative on the grounds that it is ill-founded with respect to what we actually do.

However, there are considerations which complicate this issue. First, we cannot ignore the significance of the variety we might encounter with respect to general ethical outlooks. As Murdoch notes, ethical variety does not have to be reduced to a conventional moral pluralism i.e. to differences in the general moral assumptions and values individuals (or groups) adhere to. Rather, we can focus upon the manner in which people's broad ethical approaches (including the philosophical self-conceptions involved in those approaches) may vary.[30] That such divergences exist

may give us grounds for criticism of theories which pretend
to exhaust the resources and ranges of moral experience
which the moral life may entail. Equally, the related idea
we mentioned earlier of implicit forms of moral change and
development cast doubt upon the project of explicit
specification of moral agency.

This suggests a further distinction between the way in
which moral life is conducted 'ordinarily' and the self-
conscious ethical references which serve as theoretical moral
guidance in situations where moral agents are faced with
certain sorts of difficulties. In the light of this, we may
wish to distinguish between the total range of moral agency
or expression and the reflective pictures to which agents
may refer when pressed either theoretically (for some
philosophical account) or practically (where there is a
perceived requirement for clarity in the light of
difficulty).[31] There may of course be variations with
respect to how internalised such philosophical conceptions
become in any particular context at any particular stage.[32]

We might find reasons here for affirming the particular
significance of politics. In so far as the demands of public
agency are likely to generate difficulties and ambiguities
which press hard upon our moral judgments, the demand for
theoretical guidance and the particular sort of certainty
it prompts is magnified. As we have seen, such certainties
may not, in politics, necessarily be derived in themselves
from external moral guidelines. However, the form of the
demands entailed by such references may generate a picture
of political life as ultimately 'realist' or expedient. And
such realism is not without its implications for the moral
condition of those who exercise power.

It is this context that I have argued for the necessity
of a broader conception of moral agency. The tendency to
abstract the demands of public ethics from the moral lives
of persons equally implies an abstracted and attenuated
conception of private moral life through the affirmation of
an insubstantial moral self. No adequate response to this
is possible through the dissolving of one of these two realms
into the other. The mediation provided by an image of the

positive and substantial moral character of agents render
the difficulties presented by action in problematic contexts
ones which can be accepted and recognised. The contrast here
is with the hope of _theoretical_ mediation, the thrust of
which is to render such difficulties resolvable through
prior moral reasoning. With respect to 'dirty hands'
problems, the constructive dimension to this general approach
consists in establishing a sense in which a recognition of
the persistent character of such problems may at the same
time vitiate the threat they pose to the moral character of
agents.

We can also, to this extent, point to certain
dispositions which appear appropriate with respect to the
practice of politics. The possibility of moral 'flexibility'
in relation to concrete situations, which equally serves to
establish the possibility of moral change through experience,
proves itself relevant with respect to political judgment.
In a similar sense, we have noted the manner in which a
certain form of moral 'self-sacrifice' may emerge as a
demand upon the political agent. These facets of a practical
moral disposition appear as indicative of a 'non-abstracted'
moral sensitivity which is capable of surviving the encounter
with 'worldly' publicity. An attendant implication appears
in terms of a certain 'broadness' of moral vision adequate to
the task of moral agency within an irreducibly plural or
associative context; in this sense a sensitivity with respect
to the substantive moral articulations and expressions of
others becomes relevant. These features of an appropriate
moral orientation elude the grasp of prescriptive
codification and are suggestive of a form of moral
consistency which is grounded in the positive expression of
a substantive identity (the resultant relationship between
these aspects of moral character and the positive
articulation of virtues, as well as corresponding accounts
of moral weakness will be discussed more fully in chapterIX

Implicit in these considerations has been the move
from emphasis upon abstract, universal moral criteria to

integrated patterns of social agency and contextualized
recognition of goods (associated with an ethics of virtue).
To this extent, a broadened ethics of virtue brings with it
the requirement that individual moral identity and
development exist against a constitutive background of
collective assumptions and patterns of judgment.[33]

In the light of this, when we turn our attention more
specifically back to some of the features of modern political
practice with which we began, a new set of problems comes
urgently to the fore. The modern era has brought with it
distinctive and highly significant perspectives in politics -
perspectives which place political action firmly into a
context where questions of criticism, change and, ultimately,
of history are prominent. In such contexts, where progress
is central, we have noted that the instrumental realistic
conception of politics, which can be associated with certain
modern approaches to politics and morality, can be afforded
moral status in terms of a reference to ideal ends.

This has two consequences. First, a new weight is
placed upon means-ends justifications which can come into
partnership with questions of history and of teleology.
Second, in an era of ideological politics, overt, consensual
moral suppositions may be called into question. In other
words, through ideological conflict, the foundation of
conventional moral patterns within which substantial moral
resources may develop and may be applied to the moral
problems of political agency, might be de-stabalised through
temporally transcendent moral references to political ideals.

These considerations present severe problems for
political morality. It is in such contexts that modern
ethical assumptions may take on a most ominous form, as is
evidenced in the political terror which has characterised
modern radical movements (and the reactions to them).[34]
Given that this sort of ideological conflict and moral
indeterminacy has become a prominent feature of the modern
political realm, it is essential that we should attend to
the particular problems involved.

Notes

1. see G.Ryle (1963)

2. It is quite clear that behavioural observations will
    frequently fail to distinguish between 'inner' states
    which we readily regard as distinct.

3. These considerations do not render the attempt to over-
    come mind-body dualism superfluous. Mental events as
    isolated, 'mysterious' phenomena prove equally
    problematic for a general philosophical account of
    thought and action.

4. cf. I.Murdoch (1970) p.17

5. We do not,of course, want evil men in politics. But
    this claim has no special significance here in so far
    as we do not want evil men anywhere.

6. In this sense, dispositional references do still have
    a relevance (providing we remain sensitive to the
    potential dangers we have noted).

7. Sophocles p.144

8. ibid p.146

9. H.Melville p.304

10. ibid

11. Clearly, questions of social and historical change are
    relevant here.

12. In relation to character, it may be argued that features
    which go to make up particular characters are
    independent of historical and cultural context.
    Certainly, the virtues and vices displayed by human
    beings seem fairly timeless. However, questions remain
    about the significance assigned to virtue in different
    contexts and what limits are placed on their expression.
    In this sense, self-images of a general sort remain
    relevant to self-conscious social action.

13. J.Shklar (1984) p.232

14. Shklar's conclusion that there is a parallel between
    Kantian and Aristotelian ethics with respect to
    questions of character cannot, in this sense, be pressed
    too far.

15. Murdoch takes the work of Stuart Hampshire to be a
    paradigm case of the 'current view'. As such,
    Hampshire is taken, sometimes unjustly, to be
    representative of a variety of philosophical approaches

all of which share the tendency to render the moral
agent absolutely autonomous, rational and transparent.
see I.Murdoch (1970) ch.1 and S.Hampshire (1965);(1971).

16. I.Murdoch (1956) p.39

17. ibid

18. Freedom understood in this way becomes a key theme of
    ethical theory. Hampshire affirms the possibility of
    the agent 'stepping back' from his situation in order to
    see it anew (in a broad, unencumbered way) as a central
    capacity of agents who are to be described as moral.
    It is a capacity closely related to the power of reason
    to transcend particularity.
    see S.Hampshire (1965) p.214
    We will return to the theme of freedom in more detail
    later on.

19. see J.S.Mill (1962)
    Kant's ultimate pessimism about the possibility of true
    morality is revealing in this connection.
    see I.Kant (·1948) p.72

20. I.Murdoch (1956) p.50

21. Murdoch's view is not without its own difficulties
    however. The source of personal moral visions remains
    obscure and the relation between such visions and the
    social world is a consistently problematic one
    cf. S.Lovibond (1983) p.190
    In this sense, although Murdoch recognises that this
    sort of account lends itself to social and historical
    consideration, these are themes which she does not in
    fact pursue. We shall look more closely at the social
    dimension to moral life later on in relation to Aristotle
    who is profoundly, if problematically, sensitive to
    this issue.

22. cf. L.C.Becker (1974)

23. J.Shklar (1984) p.160

24. Shklar's example here is Cardinal Richelieu
    ibid p.161

25. In part, it is the character of Billy that Vere is
    attempting to erase from consideration when he urges
    the court to attend only to the deed.

26. cf. W.K.Frankena (1967)

27. It may not be that values are always or straight-
forwardly derivable from factual statements. Searle
attempts to show how such a derivation is possible
through an argument which turns upon the move from the
specification of a certain utterance of words to the
specification of a certain speech act; and the latter
certainly can be the source of evaluative conclusions.
Essential to this progression is the distinction
between brute facts and what Searle terms institutional
facts – factual specifications of speech acts (such as
promising) involving meanings established through
conventions or constitutive rules. Although the
conventional move from the facts of utterance to
obligations is readily intelligible to agents, the
mediation involved introduces social (and possibly
historical) factors which distinguish such reasoning
from straightforward logical derivations.
see J.Searle (1967)
This is clearly related to the way in which moral
concepts do not appear to display quite the same
'objectivity' as do others. Moral concepts have a
greater 'semantic depth' than, for example, claims
based upon observations in natural science. In this
sense, no individual could claim with absolute
certainty to have completely comprehended the full
semantic depth of a moral concept.
cf. S.Lovibond (1983) p.68

28. The example, taken from Thucydides is cited in J.Shklar
(1984) p.174

29. In this connection, we can recall, in Darkness at Noon,
the way in which the Party becomes an absolute standard
by which moral judgments are formulated (and ultimately
by which truth and falsity are determined). The
relation between individuals and the Party, determined
by the requirements of the Party, becomes the key to
their moral status. In this sense, the problem may not
always be reducible to one of individual moral pride.

30. In this sense, as Murdoch suggests, pluralism may be
regarded itself as one outlook amongst others.
see I.Murdoch (1956) p.48
The idea of plurality that results from this differs

from traditional pluralism in that whereas the latter affirms a variety of central moral concepts, readily intelligible to all, from which individuals choose (or in some other way come to adhere to) particular values, the former would recognise variations in peoples' entire, organic approaches to, and visions of, the world - and in this context, the moral outlook of others may not always be readily intelligible.

31. That one may be prompted toward reflection of this particular sort, invoking references to an 'external' theory, by situations of practical difficulty is itself a significant tendency. The assumption behind it is that concrete guidance is always available from theoretical reflection.

32. There are two important issues which these considerations point toward and which we have not so far examined. The notion of ideology demands attention when we consider the relation between moral theories and practice. Important questions are raised here about the range of situations in which prescriptive moral theories become practically effective and how this issue relates to larger social questions. Further, history must play a part in the analysis and assessment of the status of ethical theories. These themes will become relevant to the discussion in coming chapters.

33. This does not imply the exclusion of any references to rules in morality. The point, however, is that independently derived rules cannot be seen as exhaustive of moral life and being. Rather, they must form elements within a more comprehensive moral constitution.

34. Certain Machiavellian themes appear to re-emerge here in a somewhat transformed way.

As the intellectual images of the modern era have deepened and become more sophisticated, new problems are created for an account of political ethics. These are problems which have manifested themselves in modern political agency - a realm which is dogged by the possibility of terror. Crucial to these developments, which herald a radicalization of politics, is the emergence of ideology and of history as central themes in political thought.[1] In order to examine fully the implications of this radicalization for the role of morality in politics, we must first identify some key features which characterise associated modern understandings of the role of politics itself.

Central to such understandings is what appears as an increasingly close identification between politics and instrumentality, the origin of which is related, in much modern political thought, to the idea of a social contract as the explanation of political authority.[2] This broad supposition with respect to the essential character of political life specifies, equally, certain broad theoretical features common to the liberal tradition; particularly, an emphasis is placed upon a comparative minimization of the scope of politics with respect to social life.[3] Where the goods and possibilities which politics is held to protect or facilitate are understood as prior to, and independent of, political life itself, any pretence on the part of politics to entail substantive, non-instrumental demands must be understood as an infringement upon liberty.[4] In this sense, themes of social cohesion, participation and the moral character of organic political structures, which figure prominently in classical thought and in brands of early republicanism, lose their purchase.

This shift of emphasis entails an alteration in the moral status of politics which is equally characteristic of the modern era. Where the role of politics is qualitatively minimized and rendered primarily instrumental, an understanding of its moral status gravitates toward

questions of what it can achieve. In other words its character is assessed by reference to certain values it might realise in practice.[5] Of course, within this broad understanding, a variety of approaches is possible which would involve different emphases with respect to the relationship between ethical considerations and concrete political agency. Thus, on the one hand, it is a theoretical approach consistent with the picture of an institutional political framework which is understood as a persisting guarantee of the primacy of certain values within the social arena. A framework of this sort may underpin patterns of broadly routinised or pragmatic agency within those institutions.[6] On the other hand, in a more radicalised political context, values bear closely upon particular agency, playing a central role in judgment where clear institutional mediations are not available.[7] Where evaluative questions concerning the best way to live (or, more minimally expressed, the conditions under which the best way to live for the individual is able to be realised in society) enter forcefully on the political agenda, possibilities of social critique and change emerge - possibilities which, within the terms of moral reference we have described, create agendas for the future.

Again, distinctions can be made within this category. Different moral agendas may be articulated within a pluralist system which would resolve themselves into competing political programmes. On the other hand, deeper ideological divergences are possible which turn upon questions of wider social change. This in turn may point to the further question of whether a particular society can itself contain, whether politically, culturally or economically, the competing interests which divergent political/moral agendas represent.[8]

It is through such agendas in general that radical political agency is given a foundation and the possibility of severe ideological conflict is established. Clearly, the repurcussions for political morality in this context will be profound. Where radicalized political procedures create

realms of agency which are future-directed and which
transcend established structures of legitimacy, considerable
emphasis is thrown back upon ultimate moral justifications.[9]

In order to explore some of the central difficulties
which emerge here in relation to political morality, we
might usefully turn briefly to one of the greatest critics
of modern radicalism. The writings of Edmund Burke are
particularly instructive here in so far as his treatment of
of the revolution in France appears in relation to a wider
pre-occupation with the corrosive effects of Enlightenment
assumptions. Such assumptions are, for Burke, the foundation
for the revolutionary project.

At no stage was Burke simply or straightforwardly
opposed to change as such.[10] His increasingly vigorous
defence of the established order must be understood in the
context of what he took to be the essential character of the
challenges it was facing. It is in the light of this that
we can find a consistency running through Burke's work as a
whole.[11] We shall therefore look at the way Burke treats
the idea of revolution and the connections he makes between
radical political projects and certain intellectual themes.
The aim will be to identify those features of Burke's
critique which may be understood to be of persisting
relevance and, in the light of these features, to examine
some contemporary examples of revolutionary moral theory.
In this way, we shall be able to assess the strengths and
weaknesses of these works with respect to the issue of
political morality.

Throughout his writings, we find Burke employing a
distinctive vocabulary, introducing notions of honour,
sentiment, esteem, trust and above all of affection into
his political thought.[12] These considerations appear as
fundamental to the possibility of meaningful and productive
social relationships and form the reference point for a
secure and fruitful political culture:

> ....no men could act with confidence, who
> were not bound together by common opinions,
> common affections and common interests.[13]

A political community must generate and sustain relation-
ships that are substantive, meaningful and which serve to
reproduce in society the bonds secured by human affection
and confidence which occur naturally in the primary social
unit, the family.[14]

Thus, despite the contractual element in Burke's
thinking, he manifests a view of legitimacy derived from
something more than a formal trade-off between personal
freedom and social interest. The obligation involved in
membership of a political community must reach into the
heart of the individual requiring a commitment that is
constitutive of a genuine affection. It is here that we
find the foundation for Burke's vitriolic speculations upon
the fate of the French revolution.

The kinds of commitments which set the terms for a
genuine political culture cannot, for Burke, arise out of
thin air; nor can they be invented or theoretically
constructed. Rather, they require the progressive development
and refinement of social institutions, conventions, modes of
recognition and self-identification. Equally, the practice
of politics requires a wisdom which cannot be codified or
set out in exhaustive precepts.

> The science of government (is) a matter
> which requires...more experience than any
> person can gain in his whole life.[15]

The re-iteration of these themes becomes urgent in the
context of what Burke takes to be the severe threat to civic
life posed by enlightenment thinking and its translation into
radical practice.

This threat appears, in Burke, to derive from two
essential and related elements in the radical approach.
The first of these is the abstract, theoretical character
of the moral project:

> All the pleasing illusions which made power
> gentle and obedience liberal...are to be
> dissolved by this conquering empire of light
> and reason.[16]

The impulse to subject civic and moral life to criteria of
exhaustive rational explanation and justification results

in a loss of respect for their organic structure. For
Burke, the power of the rationalistic mind, which attempts
to grasp the whole through abstraction, to codify and
formalize the terms of political judgment and action, comes
to see itself as a force for radical innovation.

This, for Burke, was precisely the political project
of the French revolution. Its vision was doubly disturbing
- in terms of its reference to the future and of the kind of
political world that this image of change would herald. The
revolutionary approach abstracts from the complexity of
social life, sweeping away conventional reference points
on the basis of abstract ideals. The revolutionary
purpose, says Burke,

> ...seems to have been to evade and slip
> aside from difficulty.[17]

The constructions of finite reasoning are elevated to the
status of divine wisdom; the abstractions by which human
thinking grasps the practical world pretend to the
exhaustion of its content. Under these conditions, the
social world is reduced for the radical to

> ...nothing but cante blanche upon which
> he may scribble anything he pleases.[18]

And this point relates to the second problematic dimension
to the revolutionary project.

As we have noted, the wisdom which underlies good
political practice is historically and collectively generated.
Traditions and institutions embody a depth of experience
unavailable to particular individuals. Rationalism transfers
the emphasis on to the individual as a reasoning being. And
in a moral sense, the rationale for agency is discovered not
in precedent or social observance but in absolute moral
commitments. The sovereign individual can claim sovereign
moral judgment.

The new politics, then, is the politics of will: and
as its agents, human beings become embodiments of the short-
comings of ideology. The imposition of abstract blueprints
characteristic of radicalism is not only undermining but is
also, for Burke, necessarily violent. The social world

proves recalcitrant with respect to such blueprints. And the problematic character of the project as a whole is reproduced in the commitments of those who make it. The 'purism' attendant upon radicalism generates commitments of a highly instrumental and de-humanised sort. True passion and heartfelt commitment arise out of an integrated social identification; where the demand is ripped out of context, they combine only with the pure rationalistic promise.

P.H.Melvin notes that such a combination, on Burk's view, is secured only through "the unreality of dramatic productions".[19] Burke draws a firm connection between purism and theatricality: Solidly instantiated appearances which have deep foundations in people's lives are undermined in the search for pure re-structuring.[20] But the search for purity, for what is entirely natural, is illusory and serves only to sever all connections between appearance and reality.[21] Where social means of identification are stripped away self-justifications take on an increasingly artificial and arbitrary character.[22] This is the source of Burke's conclusion that many, even in France

> ...have been made sick of their theories
> by their very success in realizing them.[23]

There is a sense in which this theorized political project has the effect of eradicating real meanings from the public realm, eroding the public material around which we can weave a coherent narrative of our lives.

A contrast with Machiavelli is useful here. For Burke, political authority is directed not simply to order but also to the preservation of a fruitful realm of action. In this sense, Machiavelli's concern with the self-perpetuating possibilities inherent in social life is shared by Burke. On the other hand, the Machiavellian pre-occupation with innovation and fortune is decisively rejected by Burke as a hallmark of violence and tyranny.[24] Thus, Burke finds the problems of temporality and the threat posed by fortune (the possibility of corruption) less pressing than does Machiavelli - rigid adherence to tradition is something upon which he is willing to stake a great deal.

Burke's determination to limit the significance of
temporality is important. The crux of Machiavelli's
modernity lies in large part in his affirmation of the
connection between political action and innovation. And
as we have seen, the set of problems with which Machiavelli
leaves us is one that lends itself to responses character-
istic of Enlightenment thought (ones which embrace with
vigour the 'breakdown' of the organic picture of political
community). It appears to be this modern tradition to which
Burke directs his criticisms.[25] It is the specific project
of modernity which Burke regards as distinctively undermining
with respect to social relationships and productive of
de-humanization.

This is not to say that, for Burke, political morality
is rendered straightforward in the context of a strong
constitutional and social tradition. The possibility
remains that in severe circumstances the right political
course will be a "critical, ambiguous, bitter portion".[26]
The point, however, is that the possibility of a morally
sensitive and humanized politics is predicated upon a social
fabric which supplies reference points for judgments,
agreements and obligations. The temptation, then, to
replace this conventional fabric with a constructed set of
radically democratized judgments is to court terror and the
loss of any moral limits.[27]

Clearly, the figure of Kant re-emerges here. The
democratization of judgment and the search for universals
(transcending the particularities of convention) appear
as central to the Kantian project. In this sense, it is
precisely those features of Enlightenment optimism
expressed so powerfully in the philosophy of Kant which
Burke regards as morally corrosive. It is through such
assumptions which place theory (and moral theory in
particular) above practical wisdom, that agendas are
established which prove disastrous in practice. As we have
found, connections can be traced between the philosophical
assumptions of which Kant is representative and these sorts
of implications with respect to political morality in the
practical context.[28]

Burke's critique of radicalism and its theoretical
foundations is a powerful one, not least because his
predictions concerning the fate of the French revolution
and its consequences proved in large measure accurate.[29]
The question remains, however, as to the relation between
the criticism of revolutionary politics and the criticism
of Enlightenment theory. In Burke, as we have seen, these
two dimentions are fused; but from the point of view of the
present, the distinction between the two has a renewed
significance. Subsequent revolutionary theories have
departed considerably from the theoretical principles which
formed the basis of the French revolution and have themselves
embodied criticisms of those principles. As a result, the
question of the character of revolution becomes more
complicated - as do the available critiques of the
revolutionary tradition.[30]

For Burke, the loss of social cohesion and the
attendant possibility of ideological disunity were due to
the influence of ideas which had their origin in the elitist,
unworldly circles of the intelligentsia.[31] As such, they
could be regarded as contingent or avoidable in a way
they could not from a contemporary standpoint. In this sense,
there is room to examine and assess, rather than to assume,
the connection between certain types of moral theory and
innovative political action. The persisting relevance of
Burke's treatment of revolution needs to be borne in mind -
as do the limits of that treatment.

We are now in a position to move toward a more direct
consideration of the thinking surrounding those modern
political movements which have proved morally most problem-
atic. Particularly, with the lessons drawn from Darkness
at Noon in mind, we can look to the example of the Russian
revolution and its aftermath.

There are certain features of the bolshevik approach
which appear immediately to render it distinctive, and
thereby, possibly, to limit the significance of Burke's
critique. First, it represents a social project undertaken
in the context of a theory of history the effect of which is

to render its ethical rationale a specific and dependent
one. Second, the commitment to a social critique grounded
in questions of class, understood as the foundation of a
'necessary' dialectic, significantly effects the place
afforded to theory, its relation to practice and the basis
of its appeal. We shall examine these factors more closely
later on; for the moment, we can note that features of this
sort have profound implications for the foundation of a
revolutionary project. The universalist theoretical
structure which characterised the ethics of the French
revolution is challenged by the assertion of historical
specificity and of social dialectic. The distinction here
also expresses itself in terms of the particular moral
references involved. The pre-occupation with formal
political equality and individual liberties is transcended
by a social commitment which denies the implied sharp
opposition between public and private.

On the other hand, there may be senses in which the
parallels between the two cases are more readily discernible
than might be supposed given these theoretical divergences.
Bergman notes that references to the French revolution are
common in the literature surrounding the Russian revolution,
as was the re-adoption of terms and labels that originated
in the former period.[32] Prominent among the bolshevik
leaders who deployed such a vocabulary was Leon Trotsky,
who demands our attention also because, unlike Lenin, he
gave sustained and direct attention to the question of
revolutionary political ethics.[33]

As early as 1903, Trotsky referred to Lenin, in the
context of a dispute over centralization in the party, as
> ...a Robespierre ...(who) transformed
> the modest (party) council into an
> all powerful committee of Public Safety.[34]

And he continued to employ analogies for critical purposes
up to his equation between Stalinism and the Thermidorian
terror of 1794/5.[35] This suggests the extent to which Trotsky
wished to distinguish between the moral approaches of the
French revolution and those which he took to be essential
to the bolshevik enterprise. However, the precise status

of the distinction is not immediately clear. On the one
hand Trotsky's general theoretical perspective appears to
commit him to something more than a contingent distinction.
The Jacobin outlook is, for Trotsky, historically specific
and bourgeois in character,

> ...appealing to the abstract man and the
> abstract citizen, in practice, with the
> help of the guillotine.[36]

In this sense, comparisons might appear to be inappropriate.
We might follow Bergman in supposing that the comparisons
we have already noted were tactical rather than theoretically
precise; but there is still a problem. Despite Trotsky's
rejection of the bourgeois Jacobin project, Stalinism is
equated not with the Jacobin terror but with the subsequent
Thermidorian reaction (see above) - and, further, he draws
direct comparisons between situational justifications of
the Jacobin dictatorship and the necessity of the proletarian
dictatorship in Russia after 1917.[37]

There are obvious reasons why Jacobinism should be a
recurring theme in the Russian context. The commitment to
radical action, to a rejection of established moral codes or
conventions and the reference to re-ordered social ends all
appear as attitudes parallel to those required by the
proletarian revolution. Thus, Trotsky affirms that the
revolutionary class should attain its ends "by all methods
at its disposal - if necessary by an armed rising, if
required by terrorism".[38] Further,

> The question of the form of repression
> or of its degree, of course, is not one
> of 'principle'. It is a question of
> expediency.[39]

The implication here is a preparedness to justify the use
of violence not only on the grounds of immediate and pressing
necessity but also by reference to long-term considerations.
As a result, violence of a deliberate, organised and
structured sort is a possibility.

Trotsky wished to establish a genuinely revolutionary
morality - one which escaped the confinement of established
precepts. Ethics, as a practical affair, must address itself

to reality; and what counts as reality for Trotsky involves
considerations which refer to the inner dymanic of a society.
The real social lives of people display clear and fundamental
differences in terms of practice, power, role, understandings
and interests - differences which, in the context of the
possibility of socially inscribed contradictions, may be
resolved into questions of class. Thus, the idea of
universal moral precepts deriving from and appealing to the
universal essence of man is rendered suspect.[40] Of course,
the idea of social division in itself is not a serious
challenge to universal, transcendent moral principle (it is
partly the point of such principles that they aim at
transcending the particularities of social life toward an
ultimate order); however, for Trotsky, class divisions are
not straightforward, empirical references - rather, they
imply that the life-project of one group stands as a real
negation of that of the other.[41] And this resists in a more
fundamental way the possibility of a transcendent moral
order.[42]

Precepts apply themselves to acts abstracted from the
context of social reality and therefore stripped of their
real meaning. To be clear, ethically, about what we are
doing, we need to know what real significance actions have
in the social world - by revealing their true place in the
web of social relations. But how precisely are we to flesh
out this enlarged social significance? The answer, for
Trotsky, lies in an historical perspective. The social
relationships which give a society its essential character
at any particular stage are equally dynamic relations. Thus,
class divisions are productive of an historical dialectic.
In this sense, the social structure is encountered not just
as a static structure but also as a set of possibilities.

On this view, judgments we might make with respect to
existing society, and attendant modes of agency within that
society, have an intrinsic historical dimension. Thus, we
can bring meaning to political action by comprehending its
place in the flux of history: in effect, we must attempt to
understand what it will achieve. Translating this

perspective into the terms of political morality, the
importance of the historical context lays the basis for
the claim that the end justifies the means.

Consequentialism, then, appears as a logical consequence
of Trotsky's revolutionary theory. However, in itself, the
slogan 'the end justifies the means' is unhelpful, ignoring
as it does the character of possible relations between means
and ends.[43] The real relationship between the means and the
ends may render the consequential calculation more complex.
Trotsky essentially endorses the 'Jesuit' approach, which
he characterises thus:

> ...the means itself can be a matter of
> indifference but...the moral justification
> or condemnation of the given means flows
> from the end. Thus shooting in itself is a
> matter of indifference; shooting a mad dog
> that threatens a child - a virtue; shooting
> with the aim of violation or murder - a
> crime.[44]

The means in itself is not morally significant: it does not
carry "its own moral tag like merchandise with fixed prices
in a department store".[45]

However, more needs to be said here. The above
illustration is uncontraversial in that the consequential
references involved can readily and indisputably be
incorporated into an immediate action description. The
moral **significance** or power of means-ends calculations
derives however from their application to situations where
contrasting action descriptions may be applied. In this
sense, the point of a consequentialist approach (which
equally gives it a role as a problem-solving moral device)
is its claim to go beyond immediate, uncontested action
descriptions toward an independent source of value.[46] It
becomes a distinctive method precisely where it is called
upon to address cases that entail means-ends relations
which themselves require some argument or underpinning.

We might note, here, that there is a sense in which
the consequentialist approach is given substance partly by
the moral perspective it is designed to transcend. That is,

by the identification of certain <u>intrinsic</u> moral judgments
Thus, Trotsky admits that under 'normal' conditions certain
precepts - against lying, for example, hold good.[47] However,
the significance of this claim appears to fall away when he
goes on to characterise assumptions of 'normality', where
universals could genuinely apply, as ideological. Ultimately

> ...the very conception of <u>truth</u> and
> <u>lie</u> was born of social contradictions.[48]

Thus, the relationship between instrumental political
justifications and 'normal' moral assumptions remains
problematic for Trotsky. And this is not unconnected to the
historical character of his commitment.

In the context of such a commitment, 'normal'
considerations appear to lose their moral purchase - and
therefore consequential judgments attain a correspondingly
greater 'purity'. Immediate moral considerations may hold
good in 'normal' times; however, the revolutionary project
is precisely directed toward the overthrow of certain
'normalities' and, as the above remark suggests, is under-
taken in the light of ends which themselves ultimately
entail the abolition of the conditions under which moral
assumptions or precepts are necessary.

In the light of this, it begins to look like an
'arbitrariness' with respect to judgment is made possible.
The revolutionary agent accrues, by definition, a moral
sanction which is applicable to all possible means. Moral
outlooks may therefore take on a certain subjectivity which
erodes the power of limitation attendant upon judgment.
However, Trotsky is keen to avoid implications of
arbitrariness.

> Permissible and obligatory are those and
> only those means which unite the revolutionary
> proletariat. Precisely from this it follows
> that not all means are permissible.[49]

The claim that revolutionary morality generates not simply
'extraordinary' justifications (consistent with a moral
arbitrariness) but also positive moral obligations suggests
the possibility of a greater specificity when it comes to
consequential judgments. In this sense, for Trotsky, the
language of limitation retains a relevance.

Trotsky displays a concern with the moral status of
revolutionary agency and a desire to offset the possibility
of moral caprice; a consequence which Burke finds central to
the idea of revolution itself. The case of the Moscow trials
is once again significant here. Koestler's account high-
lights the manner in which the moral foundation of
revolution can, in certain contexts and on certain
interpretations, result in an ever-increasing arbitrariness.

Koestler's account is not, of course,. an historical
one, but its significance is clear in so far as it presents,
in a stark manner (on occasions through limiting cases) the
implications of a certain sort of revolutionary 'purism'.
The issue of the exact relationship between this literary
treatment and the Moscow trials themselves remains open.[50]
Historical accounts do, however, suggest that events bear out
the manifest difficulties with respect to justice and moral
justification which Koestler subsequently explored
dramatically.[51] Thus, the brand of political policy
represented by the trials indisputably demands ethical
examination.

Trotsky's attitude toward the Moscow trials is
unambiguous in its moral condemnation.

> The Moscow trials dishonour the political
> regime which has conceived them: the
> regime of Bonapartism, without honour and
> without conscience! [52]

The actions and policies of Stalinism rendered that regime
morally illegitimate:

> The moral authority of the leaders of
> the bureaucracy and, above all, of Stalin
> rests in large measure upon the Tower of
> Babel of slanders and falsifications erected
> over a period of thirteen years.[53]

An important question follows: the possible justification
of the Moscow trials appears, as we have seen, to resolve
itself into a pure consequentialism. The ends of revolution
justify the means, whatever the means might entail with
respect to immediate considerations of moral judgment or,
in this case, with respect to common understandings of
justice. Trotsky's consequential commitments therefore

suggest that we must press hard upon his moral outlook
in order to find some basis for these clear and unqualified
condemnations of the Moscow trials.

In the light of this requirement, we can return to the
possibility of moral limitations. As we have noted, Trotsky
denied that <u>all</u> means are permissible in revolutionary
struggle. The qualification which might establish limits
is not, however, an unmediated moral reference. Rather, it
derives from stipulations given by the means-ends calculation
itself when it is required to be substantive rather than
abstract. Thus, real justifications emerge where the
substance of a relationship between means and ends is the
object of genuine speculation. Left as a general mode of
evaluation, the consequential principle fails to specify
prohibitions or particular, conditional obligations.[54] And
we have noted the dramatic consequences of this when applied
as a practical principle. In order to render such a
principle substantive there must be a discernible possibility
of making distinctions between genuine and false means on the
basis of specifiable relations.

Clearly, we can only make such distinctions where the
ends involved are amenable to direct causal accounts. This
has important consequences for the relationship between
actions, their justifications and the general commitments
that inform them. A condition of asserting causal relations
between actions, events or states of affairs is that the
terms of the relation are of the same order. Thus, where
we wish to identify substantial, causal-type means-ends
relationships we require the ends to be substantively
specifiable in the same way as are the means. The reference
to generalised, ideological ends therefore requires mediation
through specified ends which will, in turn, be in need of
justification. Trotsky characterises ultimate revolutionary
ends as that which

> ....expresses the historical interests
> of the proletariat...if it leads to
> increasing the power of humanity over
> nature and to the abolition of the
> power of one person over another.[55]

But this affords no clear or immediate answer with respect to particular moral justifications. Mediating judgments <u>are</u> required; and in this sense, for Trotsky,

> Problems of revolutionary morality are
> fused with the problems of revolutionary
> strategy and tactics.[56]

Crucial to moral judgments in this context, then, is the cognitive problem of identifying concrete relationships between events and states of affairs at increasing levels of generality.

The move toward generality (ultimately toward historical claims) is central to the possibility of distinguishing the revolutionary project from more incremental versions of moral pragmatism. The mechanism by which the necessary extended significance may be asserted is introduced by Trotsky in the form of a "dialectical interdependence" of means and ends.[57] The assertion of a dialectical, rather than a simple causal relation between means and ends implies a deeper qualitative dimension to the revolutionary political process: the ends are dependent not just causally but also qualitatively (in terms of their definition) upon the means.[58]

A dialectical relation of this sort can only make sense in the context of a theory of history. Where such a theory is absent, the cognitive power of identifying firm means-ends relations will be inadequate to the task of extending such judgments toward generalised or distant revolutionary ends. In this sense, justification will resolve itself, beyond the immediate situation, into questions simply of <u>motive</u>. The moral character of means depends entirely upon the <u>professed</u> end. The objectification of moral judgment which Trotsky requires depends upon identifying qualitative relationships between action in the present and future events on the basis of an understanding of history.

Trotsky's view of history provides us with a starting point.

> ...The liberating morality of the
> proletariat of necessity is endowed
> with a revolutionary character.[59]

From this, certain determinate moral claims can be deduced:

> ...When we say that the end justifies
> the means, then for us the conclusion
> follows that the great revolutionary
> end spurns those base means and ways
> which set one part of the working class
> against other parts, or attempt to make
> the masses happy without their
> participation; or lower the faith
> of the masses in themselves.[60]

In this way, from a theory of history which focusses upon the dynamics of class, Trotsky asserts certain mediate moral references which are grounded in the intrinsic relationship between proletarian struggles and communism.

The subjectivised, arbitrary forms of judgment which may be attendant upon a pure, radical consequentialism, are countered therefore, by an objective theoretical foundation. Revolutionaries, for Trotsky, must learn "the rhythm of history" and "...subordinate their subjective plans and programmes to this objective rhythm."[61] Clearly, the precise status of this objective foundation becomes of central concern with respect to the possibility of consistent moral judgment.

It is with this foundation in mind, that Trotsky's approach is criticised from the perspective of a thorough moral pragmatism by John Dewey. Brief attention to Dewey's approach will enable us to bring out the distinctive character of Trotsky's ethics, as compared with conventional forms of pragmatism, which stems from his underlying theoretical assumptions. For Dewey

> ...the choice of means is not decided
> upon the ground of an independent
> examination of measures and policies
> with respect to their actual, objective
> consequences. On the contrary, means
> are 'deduced' from an independent source
> an alleged law of history.[62]

Having rejected the ideological assumption of absolute moral precepts, Trotsky resorts ultimately to "...another kind of

absolutism".[63] For Dewey, the idea of a dialectical interdependence of means and ends comes into conflict with the fundamental claims of Marxism to be scientific. If we wish to avoid absolutist normative assumptions, genuine liberation from such assumptions can only be achieved through a 'scientific' approach.

The implication of Dewey's criticism is that an objective moral commitment must be grounded in a thoroughly empirical approach, free from the interference of normative assumptions. Dewey's empiricism has the further consequence that the practical certainties which shore up our moral commitments in practice are limited in their scope. Inductive pictures may be built up of the ways in which action issues out in the world; but it is always the case that human action is something in the nature of an experiment. Thus Trotsky's reference to history constitutes a pre-judgment which throws us back, in practice, upon an ethics of intention. Since we have no means of establishing the empirical truth of his theory of history, we can rely only on faith in a principle.

Before assessing its impact upon Trotsky's approach, we might attend briefly to the implications of Dewey's analysis. The effect of the pragmatic approach is to transform _moral_ problems into _cognitive_ ones. In this sense, the moral dimension to the issue is regarded as intrinsically unproblematic.[64]

There are two related difficulties with the pragmatic view. First, questions arise as to the possibility of hidden assumptions. The impulse to proceed with caution, especially where questions of violence or repression are concerned, reflects a hidden form of moral discernment. Violence is to be approached with particular caution because of the moral problems it might immediately entail. Considerations other than consequences appear to be relevant, then, in order to make sense of a moral agenda and the conditions under which consequential justifications are seriously invoked.[65] Absolute pragmatism appears inadequate as the support for a genuine framework within which moral judgments are made. Dewey might reply, of course, that moral assumptions are not ruled out by his approach - the point is simply that in

politics, an essentially pragmatic sphere, those assumptions can only find expression in the form of certain ultimate values or ideals which constitute objects for consequential policy. Nevertheless, the claim that politics must be understood as itself purely pragmatic, a realm of _scientific_ investigation, then it is difficult to see how particular moral sensibilities (other than in the form of generalised _ends_) can be relevant to the political sphere. In this sense, there is an apparent discrepancy between a theory of purely pragmatic political agency and the form associated judgments are likely to take in practice.

This prompts a second concern with Dewey's approach. We have already noted various ways in which a discrepancy between theories and what may be available in practice might indicate severe problems where theoretical purity is insisted upon. The pragmatist assumption that the moral issue is, at least in principle, amenable to certainty. Since one chooses the moral values which characterise ultimate ends, and these ends determine the grounds of all justifications, cognitive inaccessibility is the only barrier to the complete rejection of all immediate moral reservations. Further, the extent to which this form of inaccessibility is to be regarded as a valid limitation is unclear.[66] The risk of failure and its associated repurcussions may be understood to be a risk which attaches intrinsically to political agency. Pragmatic consequentialism identifies this risk wholly with the moral significance of political action.[67]

This identification also has consequences for questions of moral responsibility. As we have noted, this approach places the moral emphasis upon the reference to consequences; and this may render the status of moral intention uncertain. If we understand consequences as the sole available moral reference in a particular context, then in principle, intentions are not relevant. This is so because the moral emphasis is upon what is for the best in the world rather than making any immediate reference to the particular agent. Essential to Dewey's approach is the possibility of a certain disinterestedness of judgment. Objective, scientific

assessment of means and ends is required. The associated possibility of vindication through outcomes abstracts away from the person of the moral agent. This is not to say that all consequential judgments negate intentions. There will be cases where the consequences (or the likely consequences) of an action will have a bearing upon how we judge the moral intentions of the agent; equally, there may be cases where the distinctions which invoke consequential considerations will also, in application, make reference to intentions.[68]

We might say that the consequential principle, understood as a mode of justification or judgment,[69] applies to the agent who wishes to bring about morally desirable ends. In this sense, it is assuming good moral intentions and we are always free equally to identify an agent as harbouring bad intentions. It remains the case, however, that action under conditions of uncertainty, characteristic of politics, presents a problem. Good intentions do not help us with what is specified as the moral crux of the matter; i.e. the consequences. The moral decision begins to look as though it is out of our hands.

In itself, the problem of uncertainty is, of course, independent of a particular ethical perspective - the extent of the problem of 'moral luck' is an indication of this. However, what makes the issue of moral luck a peculiar and problematic one is precisely its apparent conflict with what we would normally understand to constitute consistent moral judgment.[70] When the consequentialist principle is pressed in conditions of uncertainty the concept of moral luck begins to look like exhausting the content of all available moral characterisations.

As we have seen, Trotsky tries to avoid the implications of moral pragmatism through the assertion of a certain sort of qualitative relation between means and ends. However, the precise character of this relationship and its implications for practical moral judgment requires further consideration. We have noted that Trotsky's approach might imply certain moral limitations specifiable in terms of a

theory of class. This can be understood as the basis for his criticism of Stalinism in general and the Moscow trials in particular in so far as they involved acting <u>against</u> the working class by means both of terror and of deception.

Trotsky's criticisms are not, however, without their ambiguities.[72] Ultimately, Stalin's approach reveals him to be the agent of a "new privileged stratum".[73] The implication here must be that Stalin's party no longer represents the interests of the proletariat. It is not immediately clear, however, that the moral criticism thus formulated is derivable from Trotsky's own ethical perspective. There appear to be certain central claims which Trotsky shares with Stalin. Particularly, he shares Stalin's supposition that revolution can be understood on a parallel with war and both entail intimidation.[74] Equally, terror is the "direct continuation" of revolutionary insurrection.[75]

But this "continuation" does appear at the same time to herald a fundamental shift in the political relationships involved. The distinction between a revolutionary movement led by the party, challenging the existing order and the exercise of revolutionary power by the party, through use of the state apparatus, may introduce complications.

The place of the party becomes a more prominent consideration in the light of this alteration. Political power may imply the possibility of formulating long-term policy rather than specific, tactical modes of opposition - and in this sense, the objects of justification may take on a more self-referential character, involving considerations of state.[76] Of course, the self-conscious role of the revolutionary party may distinguish it from other parties: its role involves a commitment to abolishing the state apparatus (and therefore its own power).[77] However, the emphasis upon the centrality of the party renders even this task one which involves the employment of political power.

The implications of this for the character of moral

justifications can be traced by referring back to
Trotsky's invocation of historical themes. As we have
seen, for Trotsky, it is possible to draw out connection
between the present and the future which involve more than
causal speculation. The basis of these connections is to
be found in the dynamic of the present and the role of the
working-class in that dymanic. In this sense, the
interests and possibilities attendant upon the working-class
provide a rationale for revolution (from which moral
conclusions can be drawn). At the same time, these interests
and possibilities have an objective character which
transcends subjective will. Therefore, they require some
mode of practical expression - a mediating agency. This is
supplied by the party:

> ...there can be no contradiction between
> personal morality and the interests of
> the party, since the party embodies the
> very highest tasks and aims of humanity.[78]

There is an assertion of necessity here which proves
problematic (and which gives Trotsky's claim a dimension
that appears to bring him closer to the sorts of justification
characteristic of Stalinism). We get the impression that
the relationship between the real interests of the people
and the party is underpinned by a logical necessity.
However, we must presume that this cannot be a purely
analytic matter (at least as the above sentence stands)
the fact that Trotsky wants to leave room for a critique
of the Stalinist party implies that the identification
between class-interest and party-interest must be contingent
upon something.

The specification of this further ground presents a
central difficulty. Certainly, for Trotsky, the party
cannot be accounted a genuine revolutionary party if it
divides the working-class or if it lowers their faith in
themselves. However, these considerations cannot, as we
have seen, be understood in terms simply of the 'subjective'
impulses of individuals - rather, they must be interpreted
in an 'objective' sense i.e. they must make reference to
the real interests of the masses understood as a constituted

revolutionary class. Therefore this further ground appears
as itself conditional - questions about what really
(objectively) counts as dividing the working class (as a
revolutionary class) come on to the agenda. As a result,
consequential considerations once again prove relevant.
The true test of revolutionary potentiality, it seems, can be
only, ultimately, whether it is successful. Equally, in this
sense, we are thown back upon the assumption that the party
as the objective organ of class interest provides the
guarantee that history, from the point of view of the
individual agent, cannot supply. If it is taken in this
direction, then, the argument concerning the relationship
between individual morality and the demands of the party
becomes circular. However, even if we do not press it this
far, and insist upon the contingent moral status of the
party, the fact still remains that success appears to
exhaust the moral agenda attaching to revolutionary politics.
And in practice, the relation between moral judgment and
power becomes hard to sever.[79]

We can recall that in Darkness at Noon, Koestler
explores the way in which justifications for the trials,
and the intellectual context in which they could occur, might
be understood. The role of the party looms large in this
context. The moral judgments of the agents concerned are
mediated by the party, the latter determining the 'objective'
significance of actions required for genuine moral assessment.
We have noted the implications of this approach for issues
of responsibility and the status of personal moral identity.
The moral ascendency of the party appears to be founded
ultimately upon its ability to detach itself from all
(subjective) moral considerations.

It is in this context that the self can become a mere
'grammatical fiction'. As we have seen, this transference
of the foundation of judgment allows forms of moral
reasoning and justification which sanction extreme modes of
action. Questions of inter-generational sacrifice,
arbitrary justice and misinformation are raised, through

reference to the party, in a new moral light. Trotsky's
approach transforms pure pragmatic consequentialism by the
introduction of a qualitative dimension. It retains,
however, certain crucial consequentialist features. This
is so even in the light of the reference to 'dialectical
interdependence'. Thus, it is not clear that Trotsky does
enough to avoid the severe moral implications associated
with instrumentality in an ideological context. And this
is reflected in the ambiguity of his critique of Stalinism.

We can further pursue these difficulties by referring
to the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. This is so in that
Merleau-Ponty focusses upon the central difficulties
associated with radical consequentialism and the attendant
emphasis upon success as a moral criterion, pressing through
the implications of these features with extreme consistency.
As a result, he comes to an understanding of the Moscow
trials radically different from that of Trotsky.

In a similar way to Trotsky, Merleau-Ponty asserts an
internal relation between means and ends; and thus, their
separation is understood as an abstraction.[80] The goals of
the revolution are qualitatively dependent upon the manner
in which it is undertaken; such that, if the goal is
understood in terms of the proletariat, it cannot be reached
by other than proletarian means. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty
shares Trotsky's opposition to utopianism. Utopian
justifications tend to deny the autonomy of the historical
process and replaces it with a 'fabrication metaphor'.[81]
Political agency, on this assumption, becomes amenable to
straightforward instrumental justification and it is a view
which therefore ligitimates unsophisticated notions of
'social engineering'.

However, from these similar theoretical premisses,
Merleau-Ponty comes to a different understanding of Stalinism
and of the Moscow trials. Trotsky resorts, on Merleau-Ponty's
account, to abstract 'rationalism' on order to condemn
Stalin. Despite his support of the original Bolshevik

terror, Trotsky attempts to formulate an absolute
condemnation of Stalin. In reality, for Merleau-Ponty,

> ...between Lenin's line and Stalin's
> line there is no difference that is an
> absolute difference.[82]

The revolution, in its original form, had itself implied
severe methods, including violent ones which (at least from
the suppression of the 1921 Kronstadt revolt and the
concurrent introduction of coercive policy)[83] were directed
toward the revolutionary consistuency itself. In this sense,
arguments concerning the relationship between revolutionary
ends and state violence initiated by the party do not
readily lend themselves to moral discernments between
differing regimes within the party.

But Merleau-Ponty's aim is not thereby to extend the
critique of Stalinism to those who established the original
party apparatus which made his dictatorship possible.
Rather, when we press the historical-consequentialist mode
of justification to its full conclusion, the Moscow trials,
and the regime that instituted them appear, at least morally
ambiguous. And it is a form of ambiguity which, for Merleau-
Ponty, appears an intrinsic to revolutionary politics.

Justifications may be derived from an historical
perspective upon the true significance of actions; but the
finitude which characterises judgment implies inevitable
uncertainty:

> Nothing allows us to say precisely where
> Marxist politics end and the counter-
> revolution begins...There might be an
> absolute truth if ever there was an end
> to history and the world. Once everything
> was over, then and only then could reality
> and possibility become identical, there
> would be nothing beyond the past...But the
> point is that we are not spectators of a
> closed history, we are actors in an open
> history.[84]

We engage in politics always with risk of failure; and

> ...failure is a fault and in politics
> one does not have the right to make errors.[85]

There are no fixed reference points by which absolute
judgments can be made once the revolutionary project is
entertained. The nature of Stalin's regime does not

necessarily represent an appropriation of the revolution
(it does not necessarily represent a path to inevitable
disaster); rather, it demonstrates the sort of moral vacuum
within which revolutionary states must work. Politics is
necessarily about power and power is terror.[86]

    The implications of Merleau-Ponty's approach may be
brought out by reference to his specific treatment of the
Moscow trials. Ultimately, Trotsky concluded that the
defendents were theoretical oppositionalists who had simply
capitulated under pressure to trumped-up charges. There are,
however, a number of considerations which suggest that the
situation was rather more complex. Shapiro notes that only
those who confessed were put on trial;[87] the implication
here must be that the trials have to be understood on
a basis other than that of their legal standing.[88] A further
complexity is given by the character of Bukharin's testimony.
Most particularly, Bukharin repeatedly admitted guilt in
general where he would not admit to involvement in
particular.[89]

    He was not, therefore, willing to admit to just
anything that was put to him; certain careful discernments
were being made. Bukharin, it appears, had some grounds
upon which to judge the proper conduct of his trial and the
proper form of his own guilt.[90] Bukharin defined his
responsibility thus:

            I regard myself politically responsible
            for the sum total of the crimes committed
            by the 'Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites'.[91]

For Merleau-Ponty, it is clear from this that Bukharin had
a better understanding of his own guilt than did many of
those who have subsequently judged the trials. Equally,
in this sense, Trotsky's analysis, in explaining Stalin,
cannot at the same time explain Bukharin's self-understanding.

    Essential to this understanding was Bukharin's
conception of himself as a political man - a role which
transforms the nature of questions of guilt and justification:

> Political man defines himself not by
> what he does himself but by the forces
> he counts on. The role of the prosecutor
> was to show Bukharin's activity on the
> level of history and objective activity.[92]

On objective grounds, the significance of actions appear
only as the historical process unfolds; and since 'subjective'
intentions or attitudes are irrelevant to objective processes,
judgments of guilt in politics relate directly to the
objective requirements and possibilities those processes
generate. Again success and failure become crucial.

At the time of the trials, the party under Stalin was
in a position to set the terms for those objective require-
ments. And in that sense, Trotsky, Bukharin and the rest
represented

> ...a generation who had lost the
> objective conditions of its political
> activity.[93]

Further, since certain objective, logical connections could
be made between Bukharin's actions and the idea of practical
opposition, sabotage and subversion, he was 'objectively'
guilty.

It appears, prima facie, that Merleau-Ponty's analysis
must constitute an outright defence of the trials. However,
there are further implications here which call this into
question. The historical objectivity which must underlie all
judgment implies that nothing can be said to be absolute.
History does not justify the trials absolutely since their
necessity can never certainly be established.[94] Equally,
although the objective conditions at the time render
Bukharin's guilt intelligible, his later rehabilitation is
possible.[95]

It apparently remains the case that subjective factors
in Bukharin's conduct are irrelevant. There is only one
attitude not reducible to its consequences - that of
'revolutionary honour'.[96] It is on this basis that those
like Bukharin could later be rehabilitated. Objective
consequentialism does not necessarily have absolutely the

last word. Although it is important to recognise here
that the foundation of any rehabilitation in terms of
'revolutionary honour' does not represent a return to
'subjective', non-consequential questions of guilt. Thus,
the later rehabilitation of Bukharin would not imply the
undermining of the trials themselves. Rather, it would
constitute something like a full recognition of their
"genuinely tragic" character of the trials

> ...where the same man tried to realise
> himself on two levels.97

We come to recognise Bukharin's revolutionary honour
expressed in his preparedness to contemplate his own
'objective guilt'; his willingness to regard himself not
as an individual but as a locus of historical agency.

In order to assess Merleau-Ponty's approach, we need
to generalise his treatment of the trials. His approach
is one which rejects the possibility of any universalised,
fixed position from which condemnations of violence or
oppression can be formulated.[98] Equally, moral 'purity' is
simply unavailable to us in practical politics:

> We have no choice between purity and
> violence but between different kinds of
> violence, in as much as we are incarnate
> beings, violence is our lot.99

For Merleau-Ponty, the temptation on the part of many
Marxists to argue that the violence they might initiate is
preferable because of the incontestable aims which lie behind
it is unwarranted. It represents, in fact, just another
manifestation of the desire for a 'beautiful soul' which
characterises adherence to pacifism and to moral purity.

Clearly, the issue of 'dirty hands' is raised in a
prominent manner. The switch to an objective plane of
consequential judgment does not rid us of moral ambiguity
and we act always with the possibility of being wrong (and
therefore of being blameworthy). This is the essence of
the tragic overtones of politics. Merleau-Ponty's approach
emphasises the need to recognise, when thinking about
political morality, the extent to which moral sacrifices may
be called for and absolute, transcendent moral certainties
may be inappropriate.

In this sense, 'dirty hands' problems appear as inscribed in our history, a history which infuses political judgment. At the same time, however, there is an elusive dimension to Merleau-Ponty's characterisation of this issue. The historicisation of the consequentialist approach implies that there is an added moral depth to the problem of acting politically: no moral certainties are available. But the problem of establishing clear grounds for a persistent consciousness of a moral depth here remains. Merleau-Ponty is keen to rid us of unwarranted assumptions regarding the possibility of fixed moral reference points. And in this sense, despite its historical form, moral consequentialism remains a fundamental influence in Merleau-Ponty's approach.

In the light of this, moral individuality is called into question. History, as the process by which consequential references can be made intelligible, transcends individual commitments. This is manifest in Merleau-Ponty's reference to 'revolutionary honour'. The foundation for this lies not in any 'subjective' component, but remains an 'objective', historical matter. It is therefore a possibility which emerges only through the changing demands of the historical struggle - what is at the time considered progressive. But this does not establish a clear foundation for rehabilitation, a process which would presumably entail the introduction of some other grounds for judging Bukharin. As we have seen, non-consequential factors remain irrelevant and all we can recognise is Bukharin's struggle, as an individual, to put aside his moral individuality. The question, on Merleau-Ponty's terms, seems to remain as to what grounds there could be for others to recognise what is a personal tragedy for Bukharin - at least, to recognise it in a manner relevant to our moral judgments.

Of course, we might argue here that Merleau-Ponty is pointing to an essential tension between acting and judging as an individual, according to the dictates of individual morality, and acting politically where different constraints apply and where the same certainty in moral judgment is not available. However, the character that Merleau-Ponty

ascribes to political judgment makes it difficult to see
how even the sense of a _contrast_ could be maintained here
from the point of view of the agent. The radical
consequential nature of the moral project underlying
revolutionary politics is predicated upon the obsolescence
of established moral assumptions; thus the demand upon the
agent is to embrace wholly the morality of the 'political
man'. Equally, attendant upon this demand is the move
toward a self-understanding grounded in the idea of the
'grammatical fiction'. In this sense, to the extent that
any coherent agency requires some reference to moral identity,
that identity will always be manifest as a _problem_. And in
a similar way, to the extent that Merleau-Ponty wishes to
take the historical-consequentialist approach to its full
fruition, identity is a problem for his characterisation of
political morality.

In a more general sense, this gives us an indication
of what might be a central difficulty in Merleau-Ponty's
account. The objectivity he requires with respect to
judgment transcends the moral self (which does not readily
give way to consequential judgment) whilst at the same time
requiring some theoretical _recognition_ of it. This difficulty
is reproduced in more general terms in Merleau-Ponty's
treatment of political violence. The rejection of 'supra-
historical' moral positions implies the rejection of any
absolute judgments concerning violence. At the same time
just such a reference seems to be invoked in so far as
Merleau-Ponty wishes to treat violence as a problem (albeit
an unavoidable one). Further, the commitment to humanism
as a goal itself appears to entail some non-negotiable
reference.

This general difficulty resonates with certain of the
themes we noticed in _Darkness at Noon_. Rubashov's problem
is precisely that, in the context of his own, highly
objectivised commitments, the requirement for a substantial
moral perspective is one he can no longer meet. His problem
is not simply that he can no longer live up to the demands
of the objective struggle but also that the _idea_ (which has

long informed his project) that one could live up to the
pure, objective standard is one which places his own moral
identity on an uneasy footing. In this sense, we can agree
with Cooper's remark that Merleau-Ponty fails to recognise
the 'spiritual disorder' attendant upon Stalinism.[100]

The rejection of fixed reference points carries with
it deep moral difficulties.[101] In practice, such difficulties
appear as possibly insurmountable. The role of the party
is again instructive here. In Merleau-Ponty, the political
ideals which would normally inform consequentialist politics
are 'objectivised' by reference to the historical process.
But as we have noted, history is not available for scrutiny
on the part of the finite agent (or, for that matter, on the
part of a generation). The party, therefore, is crucial as
the mouthpiece through which historical progress is
articulated. There is, after all, a reference point - but
it is not so much morally incorrigible (as is history from
the point of view of the present) as it is morally arbitrary.

Merleau-Ponty does draw certain positive conclusions
concerning the party and its modes of operation from the
premise of the historical relationship between revolutionary
ends and the proletarian interest. The political form
embodied in the party must involve an 'openness' which
implies the ability to control power without destroying it.[102]
In this sense, it must aim at inducing freely the sacrifices
that power normally imposes. These criteria form the basis
for a criticism of the form of the Moscow trials. They
were unsatisfactory most particularly in regard to their
secretiveness: the attempt was made to hide the true
political character of the trials under a veil of legal
codes (that were basically bourgeois in character). The
fault was not to kill those concerned for their ideas but
to do so without making the issue clear.[103]

But on Merleau-Ponty's terms, it is difficult to
understand these criticisms other than in a tactical sense.
His underlying consequentialism renders the true significance

of any particular political policy necessarily ambiguous.
And since the party has a paramount role, protection of
its interests (or perhaps what the party regards as its own
interest) may entail a necessary distinction between moral
appearance and political reality, Merleau-Ponty himself
notes that the relationship between the party and those it
represents may be intrinsically problematic.

> ...either one represents the freedom of
> the proletarians and the revolution is
> a chimera, or else one judges for them
> what they want and the revolution becomes
> Terror.[104]

Thus, the difficulties stemming from the loss of moral
reference points and the attendant moral ambiguities may
require resolution through an overarching reference to the
consequential demands of the party.[105]

We have already noted the implications of this brand
of consequentialism for the status of moral identity, which
can be detected in Darkness at Noon; and further, in the
light of these considerations, Burke's remarks on revolution
return with considerable force. The tragic character Merleau-
Ponty ascribes to politics, manifested in the genuinely
'dramatic' nature of the trials reminds us of Burke's
understanding of radical action as essentially theatrical.
It is precisely at the heart of Burke's critique that
radicalism entails the loss of reference points by which the
identity and self-conceptions of agents may be established.
All roots in social reality are severed and appearance takes
on an exclusive primacy. Rubashov's lament that his career
had been characterised by "the running amuck of pure
reason"[106] would have been understood by Burke.

We have noted the ways in which modern understandings
of social change re-cast the radical images adopted from
the French revolution. Particularly, the reference to an
intrinsic historical dialectic and the attendant replacement,
in revolutionary theory, of moral ideals or blueprints with
social ends qualitatively derivable from the present (from
social contradictions) is significant. Certain problematic
aspects of traditional consequentialist approaches are
vitiated by these references. As we have seen, a certain

moral burden may be thrown back upon the agent in the
present with the attendant recognition of moral ambiguity.
Nevertheless, it becomes clear that Trotsky's approach and
its extension in the work of Merleau-Ponty both remain in
certain ways vulnerable to the problems raised by Burke.

We may translate these considerations into the terms
set by the central problem of 'dirty hands'. A straight-
forward, instrumentally grounded consequentialism appears
to give no place to the problem. On the other hand, the
approach adopted by Trotsky and, in a sense, pressed to its
full conclusion by Merleau-Ponty, may lend some credence
to the issue of 'dirty hands' as a persistent problem. In
this sense, Merleau-Ponty rejects the 'fabrication metaphor'
associated with consequentially justified social projects.
Rather, the problems of terror in politics must be
recognised and accepted in their full ambiguity.

Equally, however, this does not generate a 'dirty hands'
problem in the form it has taken in our discussion so far.
The underlying consequentialist commitments involved explain
this difference. The rejection of any moral reference points
in favour of instrumental judgments appears to entail that,
in practice, moral self-identity is equally put aside –
consigned to the realm of the irrelevant 'subjective'. In
this sense, the reference to substantive moral character,
which we have identified as necessary to the practical
consciousness of 'dirty hands', cannot be given a proper
place. As we have seen, a reference of this type appears to
be evoked in Merleau-Ponty's account, but it remains always
at a vanishing point.[107]

In this way, certain key features relating to
instrumental politics and consequential justification
persist and Burke remains a prominent challenge. This
serves to hint at the strong relationship between the theory
and practice of social change in the twentieth century and
those intellectual themes we have already considered. We
are now in a position to draw out further these resonances
in the light of earlier traditions of thinking about politics

and morality. Particularly, we need to examine the manner in which original Machiavellian problematics persist and how the difficulties encountered by modern thought in addressing these issues is reproduced in the transformed context of the present century.

Notes

1. The transformation represented by an emphasis upon
    these modern concepts is not necessarily unitary or
    homogeneous. The two concepts are logically
    independent of one another. They _are_ however
    theoretical dimensions which have frequently coalesced
    in the theory and practice of modern politics.

2. A classic, formative expression of this approach is
    provided by Locke. Men submit (or consent) to political
    authority because "...they have a mind to unite for the
    mutual preservation of their lives, liberties and
    estates..." J.Locke (1960) p.73
    The grounds of authority, then, involves the supposition
    of a logically _prior_ decision on the part of individuals
    to protect their natural, pre-social lives, liberties
    and property. Political obligation is thus established
    as a subsequent, instrumental device. For critical
    assessments of more modern versions of contractualism
    see P.Johnson (1988) pp.61-66

3. This is a theme pursued in depth, of course, by Mill in
    On Liberty. See J.S.Mill (1962) pp.242-250

4. This is not unrelated to the modern affirmation of the
    right to be politically disinterested as fundamental.

5. Characteristically, of course, liberalism sets the terms
    of this moral assessment by reference to the central
    value of liberty.

6. Locke again proves a central figure in respect of this
    tradition in political thought. His emphasis is upon
    government managed and executed through determinate sets
    of laws made by the legislature. These laws are a frame-
    work which is in turn itself determined in accordance
    with natural law, the latter being understood as "the
    preservation of the society, and (as far as will consist
    with the public good) of every person in it."
    J.Locke (1960) p.77
    Thus, the primary values attaching to man's natural
    condition are upheld through the mediating system of laws.

7. This possibility hints at the underlying potential for
    the loss of any agreed of coherent moral framework.
    Put in other terms, we are reminded of the Machiavellian

pre-occupation with the challenge presented by temporality.

8.   In general, the relationship between ideological disputes and the role of values or principles may not be straightforward; and differing views about the precise nature of ideology itself will be relevant to accounts of this relationship. To the extent that ideological positions entail the presence of a comprehensive 'world view', it is possible to identify value-based disputes which occur within an agreed ideological framework. The point here however is that the development of instrumental political projects, whose ethical grounding lies in certain ultimate principles heralds the possibilty of radical critiques and severe moral disagreements in political argument. For a comprehensive account of different understandings of ideology and its role in a variety of contexts, see J.Plamenatz (1970)

9.   It may be argued here that it is easy to exaggerate the role of ultimate values or principles as motivations for action. As Skinner notes, however, given that principles may not always be sufficient conditions for actions, this does not mean that such principles do not have a role. Even in the most minimal cases, political actions require legitimating moral descriptions and the agent may therefore be limited by reference to the legitimating principles one can plausibly profess. See Q.Skinner (1974)

10. Freeman notes that the people may have legitimate grievances with respect to the state (especially on the part of the poor). The crucial question, however, is to whom they turn for representation - to sober, rational revisionists or to artful radicals. See M.Freeman (1978)

11. For a defence of this consistency, see Burke's article From the New to the Old Whigs in E.Burke (1975) See also Conor Cruise O'Brien's introduction in E.Burke (1968) pp.22-30

12. We are thus given a sense of the extent to which Burke's thought reveals psychological overtones. cf. B.J.Smith (1985)

13. E.Burke (1913) p.96

14. In this way, politics requires an association of
    "Publick men" who "bring the dispositions that are
    lovely in private life into the service and conduct of
    the commonwealth." E. Burke (1968) p.101
    In rather the same way as Plato's philosopher-king must
    not only be wise but also a <u>lover</u> of wisdom, so the
    politicians concern must be one of deep, selfless
    dedication   such that he is prepared to fear <u>himself</u>
    as a power.

15. E.Burke (1968) p.152

16. ibid p.171

17. ibid p.278 For a more modern criticism of 'rationalism'
    see M.Oakeshott (1962)

18. ibid p.266

19. P.H.Melvin (1975) p.448

20. This intellectual form finds its aesthetic counterpart
    in the form of neo-classical art. ibid p.454

21. During the Moscow trials, it was widely rumoured that
    one of the more recalcitrant defendants was replaced
    by an actor. See R. Medvedev (1978)

22. There may be a sense in which, if trust is placed in
    oneself, in the absence of 'external reference points',
    one might be left with the difficult question of what
    exactly one is putting one's trust in. Sartre's account
    of anguish in <u>Being and Nothingness</u> introduces this
    problem in a very prominent way.
    It is unsurprising that the issue of personal identity
    has proved a persistent and difficult one in relation
    to individualistic account of social life as well as
    epistemology. A useful account of the issues raised
    here is to be found in S.Lukes (1973)

23. E.Burke (1975) p.366

24. Burke notes the sense in which, when men lose social
    reference points for judgments and agency, they are
    likely to "seek support in an abject and unnatural
    dependence somewhere else". E. Burke (1913) p.102

25. There is an undoubted specificity attaching to Burke's
    work. This is so partly because his conservatism
    directs itself to the defence of a specific social
    form - a defence which sits uneasily in the modern

context. The historical context within which Burke
was writing provided for the possibility of generalis-
ation, but the success of Enlightenment assumptions
in the social arena clearly limits the application of
his thinking as a positive defence of social
institutions. Equally, however, we shall see that
large parts of Burke's critique retain at least a
negative application.

26. E.Burke (1968) p.116

27. Judgments, then, should derive not from some abstract
measure but by serious attention to "the gravity of the
case" (ibid). In a similar vein, Burke regards politics
as a realm of appearances; such that, if one attempts
to bring everyone on to this stage, connections with
the source of genuine discriminations are dissolved.

28. This connection is made explicitly by Hegel:

> What is fundamental, substantive and primary
> is supposed to be the will of a single person
> in his own private self-will, not the absolute
> or rational will, and mind as a particular
> individual not mind as it is in its truth.
> And the phenomena which it has produced both
> in men's heads and in the world are of a
> frightfulness parallel only to the superficiality
> of the thoughts on which they are based.
> G.W.F.Hegel (1967) p.33

This is not to say that Kant's philosophy is in itself
a philosophy of terror (and we can re-call here his
denial of the right to rebellion). In terms of a
direct connection here there is probably more evidence
with respect to Rousseau than with respect to Kant.
The Jacobins were avid readers of Rousseau, see G.Rudé
(1964) p.186. Rather, the point must relate to the
character of Kantian philosophy in respect of practice.
For Hegel, this problem would reflect the unrealised
or one-sided nature of Kant's philosophy, which equally
may distort practice. On the other hand, Burke's less
philosophically systematised approach suggests a
criticism which emphasises instead the manner in which
certain philosophical approaches may fail, intrinsically,
to recognise their own limits.

29. See Conor Cruise O'Brien in Burke (1968) pp.21-22 and
71-72. Thomas Carlyle's later history of the French

revolution provides an account which, when compared with Burke's <u>Reflections</u>, shows them in a particularly prophetic light. Carlyle's remark that the "sansculottism" of the Jacobins is an approach which "grows by what other things die of" is one which brings Burke very much to mind. See T.Carlyle (1906) p.77

30. Burke's fears about the upshot of radicalism are quite closely mirrored by Marx's not wholly ironic lament over the character of bourgeois society, where "all that is solid melts into air, all that is Holy is profaned." K.Marx and F.Engels (1973) p.70

31. This is not to say that Burke's understanding of revolution is based entirely upon the notion of conspiracy (although their 'unworldliness' did not stop them being artful - the 'unworldliness' lay rather in the abstraction of their commitments). He does recognise social origins of revolutionary discontent - see M.Freeman (1978). Equally, the unsystematic character of Burke's thinking does not permit the suggestion of any exhaustive social explanation cf. T.R.Gurr (1978).

32. See J.Bergman (1987) This connection extended to the erection of statues in Russian cities representing Robespierre, following the revolution of 1917.

33. Lenin's remarks on morality are scattered and, for the most part, highly generalised. Thus, he says "...morality is what serves to destroy the old exploiting society and to unite all the working people around the proletariat." V.I.Lenin (1968) p.609

34. Trotsky cited in Bergman (1987) p.80

35. See L.Trotsky (1964) pp.150-162; (1968) pp.384-410

36. Trotsky cited in J.Bergman (1987) p.81

37. L.Trotsky (1964) p.112

38. ibid p.115

39. ibid p.116

40. See L.Trotsky (1973) p.22
This indicates the extent to which Trotsky's perspective entails, as with Burke, a rejection of Kantian universalism. Although, of course, they differ absolutely in respect of the significance of established

institutions and the social differentiations they
imply.

41. See L.Colletti (1975) There is room for a distinction
    between dialectical contradictions (such as that
    between capital and labour) and "real oppositions".
    In the latter case, the terms of the opposition are
    positive and independent of one another (and they
    therefore lack the dymanic power attaching to the
    former). In contrast to Hegel, and to Lenin, Colletti
    argues that we do not have to understand the whole
    universe as being dialectical in character.

42. L.Trotsky (1973) p.21

43. Thus, Trotsky notes that the imputation to the Jesuits
    of the doctrine that any means, even those impermissible
    on the grounds of Catholic morality, could be justified
    by reference to the end of the triumph of Catholicism,
    is misleading. Such a doctrine would be "contradictory
    and psychologically absurd." L.Trotsky (1973) p.17

44. ibid p.18

45. ibid p.19

46. Beardsmore notes, in a similar way, that consequentialism
    gains a genuine foothold only by pressing toward further
    consequences, beyond qualitative characterisations.
    See R.W.Beardsmore (1969). In this sense, causal rather
    than qualitative relations are constantly brought on to
    the agenda.

47. L.Trotsky (1973) p.21

48. ibid p.37

49. ibid p.49

50. Skagestad raises a number of questions which serve to
    allay what he takes to be the perspective Koestler puts
    upon the trials as an historical event and as part of
    a totalitarian regime. But it is not clear that these
    questions undermine the moral, philosophical or
    psychological problems which Darkness at Noon throws up.
    See P.Skagestad (1988)

51. See particularly R.Medvedev (1978); L.Trotsky (1968)
    For useful general accounts of the trials and Stalinist
    terror - see G.Katlov, The Trial of Bukharin: London,
    1969; and R.Conquest, The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge
    of the Thirties: London 1968.

52. L.Trotsky (1964) p.266

53. ibid p.271

54. cf. L.Trotsky (1973) p.20

55. ibid p.48

56. ibid p.49

57. ibid p.48

58. A similar argument is to be found in I.Meszaros (1970)
    pp.180-186

59. L.Trotsky (1973) p.48

60. ibid p.49

61. ibid p.52

62. J.Dewey (1973) p.70

63. ibid p.73

64. A similar view is articulated explicitly by
Ted Honderich:

> Certainly, judgment between alternatives is
> necessary and almost certainly there is a
> right judgment. That it can be made with
> rational confidence is unlikely.
>   T.Honderich p.203

Honderich is particularly concerned with the use of
violence. Although we cannot seriously remove it from
the political agenda, on the pragmatic approach it is
difficult to find any adequate sanction for violence
if we cannot identify anything like sure, sufficient
conditions for its success. In this way, like Dewey,
Honderich urges us to err on the side of caution.

65. We have already noted the sense in which consequentialism
in general might be understood to be parasitic upon
other forms of judgment.

66. Since one cannot act **always** in complete certainty with
respect to outcomes, decisions may be required as to
the legitimate limits of uncertainty: It is not clear
what the foundation of such decisions could be given
that moral judgments are consequential ones.

67. As we shall see, certain Marxist approaches tend toward
this view.

68. The point here is that in our general moral assessments
of agents, it is frequently hard to make absolute
distinctions between actions, intentions and consequences

compelling. For a general account of the relations between intention and action, see G.E.M.Anscombe, Intention: Oxford, 1963

see also A.Stubbs (1981)

69. We have already indicated the extent to which consequentialism may be limited as a mode of positive judgment in practice.

70. Treatments of the problem of 'moral luck' can be found in T.Nagel (1979); R.Williams (1976); H.Jensen (1984)

71. It may be that in this situation, the only resort will be back to judgment based upon intention. In this sense, we can note the manner in which an ethics of intention, which, in the case of Kant, could prompt highly instrumental agency in certain contexts (see above), and a pure consequentialism display a certain symmetry. Both, it seems, suffer from a certain sort of 'one-sidedness'.

72. Trotsky's criticism of Stalin is not without its personal aspects; and often Trotsky's remarks hint at the view that, had he been there instead of Stalin, the revolution would have been a complete success. For a detailed biographical background on Trotsky, see I.Deutscher, The Prophet Armed: The Prophet Unarmed; The Prophet Outcast New York, 1954 - 1962

73. L.Trotsky (1964) p.269

74. ibid p.116

75. ibid p.118

76. Political power carries with it, clearly, a necessary conservatism.

77. V.I.Lenin (1968) pp.276-277

78. L.Trotsky (1973) p.44

79. There would appear to be an intrinsic difficulty here with respect to the idea of the revolutionary party-state. To the extent that the state, as a political entity, stands above society, a parallel may be drawn between the analysis of the bourgeois state which identifies a contradiction between its 'neutral' political role and its (class-based) social origin, and the problems generated by the idea of the party-state. In a similar way, the latter has a class role

(albeit a self-conscious one) which may, in certain circumstances, be eclipsed by its acquired role as a 'universal' political body. The moral authority attaching to the latter role would seem to require the existence of a socially instantiated concept of political obligation (see P.Winch, 1967) - a concept which does not lie comfortably with the idea of social revolution. This does not necessarily invalidate the notion of the revolutionary state, but it does highlight the difficulties associated with the general idea of a 'transitional period'.

80. See M.Merleau-Ponty (1969) p.40 and p.154

81. cf. B.Cooper (1979) p.40 The idea of the 'fabrication metaphor' is borrowed from Hannah Arendt.

82. M.Merleau-Ponty (1969) p.91

83. cf. D.McLellan (1983); R.Conquest (1972) pp.125-127

84. M.Merleau-Ponty (1969) pp.91-92
These remarks concerning finitude and meaning indicate the extent to which Merleau-Ponty's view is influenced by existential themes. For a similar attempt to blend political commitment with existentialism, see J-P.Sartre, Existentialism and Humanism London, 1973

85. M.Merleau-Ponty (1969) p.xxxv

86. It is worth noting that, on this perspective, opposition to the revolution (even in its most terroristic manifestations) will demonstrate an equal moral ambiguity.

87. Shapiro cited in B.Cooper (1979) p.60

88. M.Merleau-Ponty (1969) p.xxxiii

89. cf. P.Skagestad (1988); B.Cooper (1979)

90. This lends some credence to Koestler's drama as a mode of viewing the trials and the Stalinist experience in general. Merleau-Ponty was, however, as critical of Koestler as were the Trotskyites. See B.Cooper (1979) p.70

91. Bukharin in M.Merleau-Ponty (1969) p.45; see also B.Cooper (1979) p.65

92. M.Merleau-Ponty (1969) p.53

93. ibid p.75

94. ibid p.xxxiii

95. We may recall here Gletkin's view - shared by Rubashov - that those who are 'objectively guilty' must be painted as black as possible. Equally, Gletkin talks of the future rehabilitation of Rubashov when the revolution is over. A.Koestler p.222

96. M.Merleau-Ponty (1969) p.59

97. ibid p.63

98 Hence, Merleau-Ponty's view of Trotsky's critique leads him to equate Trotsky with Kantian ethics and the 'beautiful soul'. ibid p.163 and pp.154-159

99. ibid p.109

100. B.Cooper (1979) p.76

101. Again, the existential overtones in Merleau-Ponty's account loom large here. We get a sense of the way in which politics may manifest the 'useless passion' which, for Sartre, lies at the heart of human strivings: Political action enlists the demand for meaning and for positive identities which history nevertheless denies us. cf. J-P.Sartre (1958) pp.625-628

102. M.Merleau-Ponty (1969) p.52

103. ibid p.34

104. ibid p.117

105. Merleau-Ponty expresses doubts about the possible institutionalisation of terror and the attendant problems of structured and habitual deception which this might involve. Again, however, it is not easy to see how these dimensions to policy can be ruled out on Merleau-Ponty's terms.

106. A.Koestler (1970) p.241 Here again the question of the relationship between commitment and identity is raised. Rubashov finds himself in a position where he has effectively 'changed sides' without appearing to have done anything to this end. This reflects upon the character of Rubashov's moral enterprise. The abstraction attendant upon his commitment generates a problematic relation between his substantive moral identity and his political project. Far from securing a mastery over historical events, Rubashov becomes their victim. Moral change and adaptation fail to gain a solid purchase in the context of Rubashov's framework; and the reality of

his political commitment is therefore rendered
questionable.

Interestingly, the second interrogator, Gletkin, has
a more substantial commitment - although it does not
thereby automatically represent a solution to the
difficulty of moral agency and the attendant relation-
ship between politics and morality. There is no reason
to suppose that Gletkin's moral sensibility is any more
immune to erosion than is that of Rubashov. The image
of politics as terror remains.

107. Ultimately, Merleau-Ponty arrives at the conclusion
that, given the ambiguity it heralds in practice,
revolutionary theory may have to be understood only in
terms of a useful tool of social critique: only in
this way may terror be minimized. (Although this
clearly cannot be understood as a retention of anything
distinctive to Marxism, which is founded entirely upon
a unity of theory and practice - see the distinctions
drawn between communism and other forms of socialist
critique in the Communist Manifesto, K.Marx and F.Engels
(1973) pp.87-98. The political reticence attaching to
this position parallels closely the reservations which
we noted might be the upshot of a purely pragmatic
approach.

VII : Machiavelli Re-visited

We have seen how particular responses within the Marxist tradition to the experience of revolutionary terror have failed to provide us with an adequate standpoint from which to comprehend the full range of moral difficulties generated by innovative political agency. A central theme has been the underlying commitment to moral consequentialism which, on inspection, appears to place political action on a footing that prompts uncertainty with respect to questions of moral identity and judgment.

The study of Merleau-Ponty reveals a central difficulty concerning the status of moral self-conceptions - a difficulty which is compounded by the fact that political agents are also moral individuals. It is in this context that the idea of the 'political man' becomes significant. The political realm has different horizons and presents a different perspective from that of ordinary life - it is historically-grounded and future-directed - and as a result, committed political action makes large demands upon the agent. These demands turn upon the requirement that agents reconcile themselves completely to this re-constructed environment. The conditions that pertain in this context demand a moral commitment which transcends the structure within which individuals, as moral beings, conduct themselves and acquire a positive moral self-identity. Thus, the moral commitment underlying the political project manifests an exclusivity with respect to other sorts of practical and ethical relationships or obligations.

A central problem here is to discover an adequate framework for practical judgment and for action. Despite the possibility of moving to differing, and more abstract, levels of meaning with respect to actions, and of the preponderance of structural imperatives, practical judgment is, as least in one sense, an irreducibly <u>individual</u> matter.[1] The individual agent requires some mode of conferring meanings upon possible actions and of providing reasons for acting, including more of less proximate moral references.

In the light of this, problems emerge with respect
to the possibility of judging and acting in a meaningful
way in a political arena characterised in the manner we
have outlined. It is a field of agency where 'subjective'
references to individual moral conceptions and self-
conceptions are transcended: a realm of radical 'purity'.[2]
An understanding of this sort encourages moral self-
conceptions which are 'evacuated' with respect to positive,
immediate content. Equally, those patterns and structures
within which such substantive identifications may develop,
and to which reference can be made, are rendered
insignificant.[3] And it is in this context that the prominent
role of the party, as the fount of meaning and ethical
significance, becomes intelligible.[4] A new 'objectivized'
mode of reference is established which at the same time
secures the relation between morality and power. This
appears as a product of an historical consequentialism.

However, we have also seen that, in its historicized
form, consequentialism undergoes a transformation which is
more than simply a 'radicalization'. It also creates the
possibility of a qualitative relation between means and
ends. Clearly, this might have implications with respect
to the possibility of immediate moral limits and the space
for questions of substantive moral identities (such that,
ultimately, it would barely merit the title consequentialism
at all). Equally, as we have seen, these possibilities
appear to remain largely unrealised. Certain fundamental
consequentialist assumptions remain in the work of Trotsky
and Merleau-Ponty such that the means-ends relationship
remains the crux of political morality. In the light of
this, the qualitative moral relationship, hinted at by the
notion of a 'dialectical interdependence' of means and ends
and by the reference to 'proletarian means', can be afforded
no further significance. Proletarian means become themselves
derivable only by consequential judgment - through the key
reference to success.

We shall subsequently refer directly to the moral and
political premisses upon which the Marxist project is founded

in order to identify alternative ways of proceeding which
might allow greater significance to be afforded to
qualitative moral considerations. First, it will be useful,
on the basis of the above, broadly stated considerations, to
draw out more fully the connections between the central
problems and responses we have been considering and the
themes which appeared earlier in relation to historical
treatments of political morality.

We have already noted the manner in which Machiavelli's
thought re-asserts itself when we look at modern
revolutionary projects. These connections can now be made
more explicit. We can recall that Machiavelli leaves us
with a range of problems associated with the possibility
of a strong relation between moral justifications and
political power. The question of 'dirty hands' is thereby
thrown into sharp relief and provides a central reference
through which these difficulties may be articulated.

Such difficulties resolve themselves into questions
concerning moral limits applicable to the 'dirty hands'
problem. First, questions emerge with respect to what we
have termed 'internal' limits; the problem is whether any
qualitative moral limits may be applied to the actions and
policies which political necessity (itself a moral necessity)
places upon the practical agenda. We saw that, in
Machiavelli, the notion of political virtue, of prowess, was
one that could be used sparingly and could be understood to
be in principle independent of the facts of political power.
As such, certain intrinsic limits might be available.
However, the issue was complicated by the fact that the
role of 'fortune', as a primary threat to political life,
renders <u>success</u> a crucial criterion.

At the same time, a related problem of 'external'
limits emerged; a problem concerning the possibility of
specifying limits to the issue of 'dirty hands' itself.
The relationship between political virtue and success throws
a great deal of weight (moral weight) back upon the agent

as the pivot upon which political justifications turn.
Thus, the distinction between political justifications,
ambition and self-interest tend to blur.

These two central issues re-emerge in the transformed
context of modern radicalism. Clearly, there are common
features which render this connection intelligible. The
emphasis upon acting in conditions of uncertainty and
disintegration is re-intoduced, as is a concern with the
relationship between politics and innovation. In this sense,
certain 'foundational' moral references which might be
thought to provide a clear ground for judging political
agency are rejected; and problems associated with the
'autonomy' of the latter (or its moral 'impossibility') are
sharpened.

These considerations enabled Merleau-Ponty to write
approvingly of the Machiavellian approach in regard of the
frankness it displays with respect to political ethics.[5]
We can also refer here to the attempt to draw out connections
between Machiavelli and revolutionary politics provided by
Antonio Gramsci in <u>The Modern Prince</u>. For Gramsci, the
image of the prince is one which finds application in the
modern arena. Although this re-application entails a
re-casting of the image.

> The modern prince...cannot be a real
> person, a concrete individual. It can
> only be an organism, a complex element
> of society, in which a collective will
> ...has to some extent asserted itself
> in action.[6]

The emphasis upon creating new material social relationships
generates the need for an altered (socially based) political
agency. But the revolutionary movement, led by the party,
fulfills a similar role, as a focal point for the re-
generation and application of virtue. Thus, the prince

> ...represents plastically and
> anthropomorphically, the symbol of
> the collective will.[7]

For Gramsci, the image of the prince is evoked in order that
the political will of which he is the focus might find
expression. It is this sort of focus which can provide a

reference point for expression of the modern popular (and revolutionary) will. Equally, as a channel for 'political passion', the 'modern prince' appears as a grounding for revolutionary ethics,

> ...bringing into play emotions and
> aspirations in whose incandescent
> atmosphere even calculations
> involving individual human life
> itself obey different laws.[8]

The modern prince becomes the point of reference for judgment, replacing "the divinity or the categorical imperative".[9]

The extent to which a political image such as that of the prince is readily identifiable with the social movement underlying the revolutionary project is, of course, questionable. As we have already noted, the relationship between the political character of party agency and the social claims underlying class struggle is a problematic one. Nevertheless, Gramsci's account brings out the senses in which some of the problems associated with Machiavelli's political ethics are relevant with respect to the revolutionary agenda.[10]

At this point, equally, it is important to emphasise the differences which, in general terms, depend upon an altered intellectual context. Again, the key concepts of history and ideology are central. The move from the prince as political agent to the party revolutionary body results in the removal of political projects from the arena of personal virtue. For Machiavelli, the political world is a distinctive arena which entails a distinctive set of virtues. Thus, it is a field which can call upon these distinctive capacities, and the exercise of the virtues that entail them; in exceptional times, it may call upon those who are exceptional in this sense. Revolutionary approaches, in contrast, have made reference to more generalised moral ends which appear to transcend the particularities of the political arena.

Despite his deployment of historical material, Machiavelli's view of history cannot be accounted a 'theory

of history' in the modern sense. The cyclical form which
history adopts in Machiavelli's writings belies the notion
of a progressive historical narrative, and the sorts of
revolutionary social changes which stem from the Marxist
theory of history would have meant nothing to him.
Machiavell's sensitivity to questions of temporality in the
republic is qualitatively transformed when 'history' becomes
a pre-occupation. Equally, the political agency constituted
by the revolutionary project, manifests a novel rationale.
The commitments of the prince are directed toward preserv-
ation; toward generating the resources which enable the
city to maintain itself in the face of fortune. This
certainly might involve questions of re-vitalization and
of salvation, but these concerns are far from being
revolutionary ones. Thus, fortune in Machiavelli represents
a difficulty endemic in political communities - it cannot be
defeated, only temporarily pacified. In this sense, the
project of re-vitalization through the exercise of virtue
is equally a persistent one. In contrast, the modern
revolutionary project has been framed in terms of trans-
cendence and of mastery: and in this sense, its character
as a project is determinate. This generates renewed
attention to the moral rationale for political agency.

It is in the light of this that we can identify, in
the revolutionary approaches we have considered, the
elements of a response to the Machiavellian problematic.
Trotsky and Merleau-Ponty both manifest, to a greater or
lesser degree, some sensitivity to the problems of moral
ambiguity inherent in politics. However, we have noted
the ways in which such ambiguities might fade from view in
the practical context. We have also noted an underlying
consequentialism which goes far in explaining this difficulty.

There is a sense in which revolutionary theories have
pointed toward a transcending of the 'dirty hands' problem
by reference to a mode of moral reasoning which, in its
radical form, poses itself against all those further or
contrasting moral references. It is useful, with this in
mind, to make comparisons with attempts to overcome 'dirty
hands' problems.

We can recall here the pre-occupations with progress,
rationality and moral certitude which appear to inform
central features of Kantian ethics. In chapter III, an
examination of these features revealed the implicit
difficulties associated with their practical form. Central
to this proved to be the 'theorizing' of moral judgments
such that they could be abstracted from the terrain of
practical life and activity. The result of such a process
of abstraction appeared to be a lack of attention to
ambiguities and distinctions within the field of moral
judgment itself, with attendant difficulties stemming from
an 'exclusivity' of certain sorts of practical moral
rationale.

This form of moral 'exclusivity' resonates with
certain of the considerations we have encountered in
relation to revolutionary theory. The search for moral
certainties figures prominently in association with a moral
transcendence of the present in favour of a perceived future
goal.

We can take this point further by recalling the manner
in which the Enlightenment agenda - including, in an
indirect sense, that of Kant - may generate highly
instrumentalised political agency; a procedure brought to
fruition by certain brands of Utilitarianism. We have
already noted, in this connection, that a certain 'symmetry'
can be detected between an ethics of pure intention and
one focussing upon consequences.[11]

In thelight of this, we can identify an Enlightenment
legacy contained within revolutionary ethics. Revolution,
thus understood, takes on the appearance of the <u>political</u>
completion of a broadly-stated intellectual project of the
Enlightenment.[12] The key emphases which define this
relationship centre upon the issue of political instrument-
ality, questions of means and ends and the realisation in
practice of prior, specified moral demands or objectives.
In terms of political morality, agency gains its justification
by reference to these prior suppositions.[13]

We have already mapped out the sense in which these
sorts of suppositions appear symptomatic of an inadequate
picture of the 'dirty hands' problem and of a certain
failure to attend to the full depth of those problems.
As a result, the possibility of the persistence of this
problem in practice is eroded. We have also noted, however,
that some of the more ominous consequences of this conception
in practice have been themselves especially evident in the
context of modern revolutionary practice. This suggests
that these particular failings are sharpened and display a
greater practical gravity in their radical guise.

In this sense, an understanding of the Marxist project
which frames its moral rationale in terms set by means-ends
relations, generates an inability to avoid the possibility
of terror and the loss of moral reference points. This
understanding informs Steven Lukes' treatment of the
relationship between revolution and ethics. For Lukes, the
crux of Marxist moral claims is based upon "a radical critical
perspective from the point of view of 'human' society"[14]
And this has the form of "...the external perspective of a
counterfactual world."[15] The idea of a 'counterfactual world'
appears as a political goal which embodies an ultimate moral
reference, as set of social values, held to be foundational
to the political project. It is thus a reference which can
be invoked in the moral justification of the practical means
demanded by that project.

On the basis of this broad approach, we are in a
position to make clearer connections. It is an approach
which, in a certain way, mirrors the 'unworldliness'
previously identified in relation to Kantian ethics. There
is, of course, a central difference in that the 'unworldly'
values specified by Kant lie at the heart of the moral life
itself rather than appearing as ends in a distinctively
political context: and thus, the relationship between the
two is far from a direct parallel. The point rests rather
upon what we previously identified as the possible
consequences of the Kantian approach with respect to political
morality. The absolute, a priori character of Kantian ethics
generates problems in relation to practice in a differentiated

world - problems which become prominent in relation to politics, where the strict adherence to absolute principle appears inappropriate. The route toward a 'realist', highly instrumental politics is then opened up.

Further to this, if the de-thronement of absolute, 'unworldly' values in the ambiguous sphere of politics is not to imply a complete moral vacuity, the re-instatement of those values as modes of specifying counterfactual ends is suggested.[16] The movement involved is toward an increasingly instrumental picture of moral agency which specifies an approach to political morality framed in terms of the means-ends problem. In this sense, what we discover in the moral framework of modern revolutionary projects may be understood as the inheritance of a tradition and the implications of that tradition. (The Marxist approaches we have so far considered are far from being directly Kantian in character - both Trotsky and Merleau-Ponty set themselves firmly against the influence of Kantian ethics in the interpretation of Marxism). The central, shared difficulty here relates to the possibility of conferring upon political agency a moral potency which demands the transcendence of all problems deriving from 'worldly' multiplicity.

Lukes takes the means-ends problem as a mode of articulating the central ethical difficulty in Marxism. Its moral perspective is "long-range and perfectionist" and, as such, means-ends relationships remain obscure, Marxism fails to see

> ...the inescapable need both to specify possible futures as closely as possible, indicating which are more or less probable and to set out the grounds for supporting the struggle for one of them, by showing how it could realise values that would justify that support.[17]

The point, then, is to refer to more immediate outcomes or attainable goals through reference to ultimate values such as justice and political rights.[18] In this way, compelling means-ends justifications could be formulated.

There are two difficulties with this response. First,
if it is understood as a solution applicable to Marxism, it
is inappropriate in so far as it negates those features
which would render Marxism distinctive as a theory and as
a political project. But more generally, it leaves us still
with the difficulties attendant upon a conception of
political morality as essentially an instrumental matter.
Although instrumental judgments can and will play a role in
politics (and make themselves felt in the associated moral
framework) the problem, highlighted by the issue of 'dirty
hands', is that of entertaining moral ambiguity in this
context.

In general, then, the problems we have identified with
respect to revolutionary projects appear, in a somewhat
re-cast form, to refer back to the central difficulties
surrounding the 'dirty hands' issue and the problems involved
in attempting to formulate solutions. The attempts to find
a clear ethical basis upon which 'unproblematic' judgments
will be made available in politics reveal implications
suggestive of highly 'realist' judgments. These implications
are reproduced in the assumptions behind much Marxist thought
and practice, where the 'realist' mode of judgment is
applied in an historical context.[19] It is worth noting here
that alternative Marxist approaches can be found which are
contemporary with the period of the Russian revolution.
Notably, Lukács attempts to distinguish between the
revolutionary project and political realism (even in its
non-legal as opposed to its legal form).

> If ever there was an historical movement
> to which Realpolitik presents a baneful
> and ominous threat, it is that of
> socialism.[20]

The essence of this danger, for Lukács, resolves itself
into the unwarranted and misleading distinction between the
transcendent object of the revolutionary struggle and its
immanent character. A proper understanding of the social
movement must regard it as "...at once the objective itself
and its realisation."[21]

In a similar vein, Victor Serge points to the immanently-
grounded essence of the revolutionary movement:

> We shall prove the strongest if we
> attain a higher degree of consciousness
> than our adversaries: If we are superior
> in firmness, vision, energy and humanity.[22]

These remarks, together with those of Lukács, suggest a
formulation of revolutionary ethics which avoids the problems
of locating the focus of justification entirely in the
future, as an end to which the revolutionary process itself
is merely a means.[23] The suggestion relies upon the
possibility of generating intelligible references in the
present which find application with respect to the moral
grounding of a movement which is, at the same time, future-
directed.

It is not, however, immediately clear how a transcendent
objective can also be immanent. Translated into moral terms,
the difficulty seems to be that if, as is fundamental to the
revolutionary perspective, the moral values and assumptions
which infuse existing society are in fact merely ideological
and given that fundamental change is only possible on the
scale of structural social change (i.e. by a revolution) it
is difficult to see how a moral rationale can be established
other than by reference to alternative sets of values
embodied in future goals.

In this sense, the central image of the future-
directed 'counterfactual world' is a resilient one. In
order to see if any more substantive significance can be
attached to the 'immanent' dimension to revolutionary ethics,
we need to return to the writings of Marx. The central
point of this investigation will be to assess the possibility
of formulating an alternative picture of political morality
which is resistent to the problematic assumptions with which
we have been dealing. Clearly, this will entail some re-
examination of the general character of social change and
what it implies for questions of means and ends. But also,
it will entail remaining sensitive to the sense in which,
as a social movement, it must equally display a political
dimension.

1. Even if we wish to see social life generally as 'rule governed' behaviour, this does not deny the need for some reference to individuals' concious ability to judge. The latter remains a condition of intelligible behaviour.
   See Wittgenstein's discussion of following rules in the Philosophical Investigations I,197-241. The close relation between the idea of rule-following and the notion of agreement suggests that rules need not be seen in a purely 'legalistic' sense, as externally applied (in other than an educational sense).
   cf. P.Foot (1978) p. 187
   See also P.Winch (1956) pp.57-62. It is possible to draw parallels between rules thus understood and the idea of customs of culturally-instantiated habits.
   Both may allow room for, and perhaps require, the idea of individual judgment. In this sense, rules do not supply exhaustive explanations of all actions.
   cf. M.Hollis (1977) pp.120-121.

2. The problem here is not simply that individuals are not allowed to 'decide for themselves' what to do - it is not a problem attaching to the idea of freedom as a condition of moral agency. Rather, it is a matter of the adoption of an abstract, historical ethics which is unable to gain proper application (i.e. to provide us with any meaningful criteria) in relation to the individual agent. This is guaranteed by the 'secrecy' of history. The importance of 'subjective' dimensions to intelligible social actions is a feature of sociological understanding emphasised by Max Weber - see The Methodology of the Social Sciences: New York 1950. For different perspectives here, see J.Habermas (1972); C.Taylor (1971)

3. There may be an inherent notion of 'discipline' attached to morality - although the place of such a notion with respect to a general understanding of moral life is contraversial. To this extent, it might be argued that the intervention of accounts derived from philosophical ethics, or from a theory of history represents an

an alternative to worryingly 'individualistic' pictures of moral agency. They may, in this sense, introduce an essential reference to self-transcendence without which morality cannot readily be understood, even in a highly relativistic form. A way of distinguishing between real and apparent moral claims is established which would overcome the possibility of 'hidden' moral agendas. (Kant and Marxism share a concern with the possibility of divorcing moral claims from certain sorts of interests). However, the question remains as to the precise role and character of the self-transcendence involved. If some notion of this sort is indeed intrinsic to morality, then the problem associated with 'theorized' ethical approaches cannot simply be reduced to the idea of imposition - this will not adequately characterise the distinction between 'worldly' and 'unworldly' morality. Of course, the world itself, as an arena of judgment and agency, imposes itself upon us in a moral sense. However, it does not appear to impose itself in the same way as does a theorized moral framework. The moral structures given by the social world appear as intrinsic to the collectively derived practical patterns and conventions which confer meaning upon action and enable identities to be forged. Inherent in such social structures is the possibility of internal differentiation and consequent moral multiplicity. And this fact is indicative of the extent to which such structures demand and require the application of individuals' moral resources and capacities for judgment (the importance of moral character is thereby re-emphasised). The 'blueprints' which are characteristic of moral theory tend to mediate these structures and to transcend their ambiguities. In this sense, the character of the 'imposition' involved alters significantly, taking on a newly abstracted form. The necessary 'engagement' we have with the world is not reproduced with respect to philosophical blueprints or to the Party (at least, where the latter is understood as a mouthpiece of history). We shall return to this issue later on.

4. We can recall here Burke's reference to 'unnatural dependence' (see chapter VI)

5. Merleau-Ponty (1969) p.112. See also B.Cooper (1979) pp.48-50

6. A.Gramsci (1971) p.129

7. ibid p.125

8. ibid p.140

9. ibid p.133

10. The rejection of the bourgeois liberal agenda is significant to an understanding of these re-emerging connections. The institutional instantiations of the responses liberalism might offer to Machiavelli are themselves called into question by the revolutionary perspective.

11. This is not only is so far as Kantian ethics may, in certain contexts, become highly instrumental, but also in that an emphasis upon pure consequences in politics may, in a radical context, place much hidden weight upon intentions with respect to moral discernments.

12. This aspect is explored in A.J.Polan (1984) ch.2

13. This is not to say that this feature of thinking about political morality is the only debt owed to the Enlightenment, or even more specifically, to liberalism by Marxism.
     This point is made in A.Gilbert (1986); see also G.A.Cohen (1978)
     The point is, however, that this is a peculiarly problematic issue and the problems are magnified when certain sorts of resolution sought by modern ethical theory are adopted directly by the Marxist tradition.

14. S.Lukes (1985) p.86; see also S.Lukes (1986)

15. ibid p.82

16. This is reminiscent of the movement we have noted earlier from Kantian ethics of pure will to Utilitarian social projects.

17. S.Lukes (1985) p.42

18. ibid p.141

19. It is this context that the idea of a 'counterfactual world' becomes significant with respect to justification.

20. G.Lukács (1972) p.6

21. V.Serge cited in Lukes (1985) p.124
    Lukes sees the approach represented by Serge as lacking
    in real force in that it does not allow us to address
    the means-ends question in a substantial way.

23. Serge's approach entails a criticism of the Stalinist
    terror in that it ignored the centrality of collective
    moral consciousness with respect to revolution. Without
    this central pivot, revolutionary morality becomes
    arbitrary and its procedures conspiratorial. See
    ibid p.111.
    Of course, more has to be said here if this approach
    is to gain genuine purchase.

VIII : <u>Marx's Political Morality</u>

A direct examination of the writings of Marx will
enable us to draw out distinctions between the original
approach established in those writings and subsequent
re-interpretations of the sort we have already considered.
The argument in this chapter will rest upon the claim that
there <u>are</u> considerable distinctions to be identified here
and that these distinctions are relevant with respect to the
ethical issues surrounding the character of political agency.
This will entail an assessment of an 'alternative' ethical
approach which might prompt a more constructive understanding
of 'dirty hands' problems: constructive, that is, in terms
of its ability to grasp the full depth of the problem <u>and</u> in
terms of its implications for self-conscious political action
and the relationship this might bear to moral identity. To
this extent, certain of the considerations raised in earlier
chapters concerning the moral resources of individuals, and
their significance in politics, will re-emerge.

We must always bear in mind, when looking at Marx, that
he is consistently motivated by a revolutionary commitment.[1]
And 'revolution' here is to be understood not as an
'alteration' but as a 'social movement' - in the literal
sense of a movement of society; a change in the <u>form</u> of social
life. Thus, the problem of Marx's ethics is not so much to
explain how Marx can sustain a moral judgment upon society
in the face of his 'scientific' socio-historical analysis;
rather, we must see how revolution as a wholesale 're-
generation' develops equally as an ethical re-generation.[2]

In this sense, we must examine Marx's work with an eye
to assessing the manner in which it might emphasise 'immanent'
dimensions to the moral project of revolution and what such
an emphasis might mean for questions of political action.[3]
To this extent, the possibility of assigning a role to
questions of virtue and moral character becomes significant.
Marx's ethical perspective is not articulated in any
systematic way; and thus, there is no immediate framework
within which we can formulate clear implications with respect
to political morality in Marx. However, Marx's extensive
writings on politics provide a basis upon which we might gain

some insight into the bearing moral considerations can have upon political action on Marx's view. Most particularly, the writings on the Paris commune prove illuminating in this respect. We can initially establish this relevance by reference to one example. During the course of 1871, the Commune took and subsequently executed sixty-four hostages, including the Archbishop of Paris and other clerics.[4] It is an example which Marx clearly regards as presenting moral difficulties; and his account of the circumstances and the essential character of the incident are revealing.

There are a number of key aspects to the case which Marx emphasises. First, the moral implications of the act itself are considered; and part of the point (and of the difficulty) here is that the hostages were, in a certain sense, innocent with respect at least to the immediate conflict. Thus, a moral difficulty arises in relation to the idea of "...innocent men who, with their lives...were to answer for the acts of others."[5] Second, some relevance is given to the conditions under which the action was taken; Marx is keen to emphasise that the imprisonment and execution of the hostages was undertaken in conditions of extreme urgency and a certain sort of necessity. It is in the form primarily of a response that the action is to be understood, in the light of the army's policy of executing communist prisoners. In this sense, it was "...to protect their lives.." that hostages were taken by the commune.[6] And subsequently, offers were made by the commune to secure an exchange of hostages. Only after the refusal by the military commander, General Thiers, to make exchanges or to suspend the policy of executing prisoners did the commune resort to executions.

In the light of these features of the situation, Marx draws certain conclusions concerning the moral postures adopted by those involved. The reluctance on the part of the commune to take these measures (manifest in the attempt to pursue alternatives) appears, for Marx, as suggestive of a certain moral sensitivity with respect to this issue which contrasts with the approach of the opposition. The latter

branded the commune murderers - a reaction which

> ...proves that the bourgeois of our days
> considers himself the legitimate successor
> to the baron of old, who thought every
> weapon in his own hand fair against the
> plebian, while in the hands of a
> plebian a weapon of any kind consitituted
> in itself a crime.[7]

Thus, for Marx, the approach adopted by the opposition
reveals a thoroughgoing instrumentality. But this conclusion
with respect to the moral failings of the enemy also serves
to confer a problematic dimension upon the actions of the
commune itself. The rejection of the view that every means
is by definition acceptable leads us to further questions
concerning the moral character of the means employed by the
commune. Moral differentiations may become possible here.

The rejection of blanket, instrumental justifications,
suggests that more needs to be said with respect to the
actions of the commune in this case.[8] One way in which we
might suppose a justification to be supplied is by reference
to the relative historical status of the actions of each
side in the conflict: this distinction is, after all,
consistently evident in Marx's writings. However, he does
not bring quite this sort of perspective to bear upon the
case. Rather, his analysis proceeds from what appears to be
an affirmation of the intrinsically problematic nature of
hostage-taking and executions.

As we have seen the ascription of innocence here is
significant. Clearly, where we understand justifications
with respect to political necessity as ultimate, and thereby
as independent of all immediate judgments, innocence is
automatically irrelevant.[9] Thus, for Marx, the action does
not admit of categorical vindication. We can refer to an
earlier example here. At the inception of the commune, the
"men of order" were left, by the Central Committee, to escape
and to rally their forces. The latter understood this as
"mere symptons of conscious weakness".[10] But, for Marx, this
was a misinterpretation of what was in fact an expression of
the "magnanimity" of the commune. Thus, Marx wishes to
retain the application of immediate moral considerations.

Although we should note that ultimately he nevertheless regards this particular case as one of an "indulgence" - their opponents were not disarmed or imprisoned, "... as ought to have been done".[11] In a corresponding manner, Marx's reservations about the policy of hostage-taking need not imply that such a policy simply should not have been employed.

The example, then, appears to introduce the possibility of entertaining persistent 'dirty hands' problems. In order to gain a firmer grasp upon the background against which such problems may be thought significant with respect to the moral agent, it is useful to give attention to the more general ethical foundation of political agency in Marx. This will also allow us to make a more thorough comparison between Marx's approach and the themes we have been inspecting in previous chapters.[12]

In order to understand Marx's approach to ethics, we must give initial attention to the critique of religion - which Marx himself saw as fundamental.[13] The moral potential of individuals has been represented historically by reference to the demands of religious observance: and the terms of moral agency have been set by such demands. As a result, the ethical life of men ceases to find its foundation in their real lives, becoming instead "the fantastic realisation of the human essence.[14] Morality derives from an ideal defined 'externally', specifying demands and prescriptions which gain their validity as absolutes from the postulated authority of the spiritual realm.

However, the full force of Marx's critique is not given simply by the 'spiritual' nature of the religious ideal. This becomes apparent when we note his parallel critique of various attempts to 'secularise' ethics. Abstract forms of humanism, exemplified in the work of Feuerbach, attempt the 're-location' of the spiritual essence in man. And the ideal given by reference to a 'human essence' is no less 'fantastic' than that of religion. German 'humanist' socialism was concerned to represent

> ...the interests of Human Nature, of
> Man in general, who exists only in the
> misty realm of philosophical fantasy.[15]

What is common to these two critiques - what gives 'humanism', for Marx, a religious aura - appears to be the identification of a certain ethical abstraction. The ideal is counterposed as an external measure, to the real. The mistake here for Marx, is to take as one's starting point a position outside the realm of concrete experience. And in this sense, certain features attaching to that real experience are ignored. Circumstances, social dynamics, character and possibility fall away in the face of the ideal.

There are also distinctions to be drawn here; and these help us to understand more of what Marx is trying to say here. Feuerbach certainly represented an advance upon traditional religious ethics. His achievement lay in "resolving the religious world into its secular basis."[16] In this sense, he was "going as far as a theorist can without ceasing to be a theorist."[17] His advance is however at the same time a limited one: and its limitations relate to its 'theoretical' character. His approach establishes a theoretical basis for moral references which bear only an attenuated relation with the real experiences of individuals.

For Marx, of course, these ways of thinking are expressive of certain real social formations:

> The struggle against religion is...
> indirectly the struggle against that
> world whose spiritual aroma is religion.[18]

Religion is an 'inverted' consciousness which arises from an 'inverted world'. And the 'theorizing' of ethics is an (albeit transformed) re-formulation of this inversion.[19]

In general, the attempt to give a universal, theoretical grounding to ethics provides us with abstract demands. Marx's constant pre-occupation is with the substantive life experience of individuals as the general starting-point:

> The premisses from which we begin are
> not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real
> premisses from which abstraction can be
> made only in the imagination. They are
> real individuals, their activity and

> their material conditions of life,
> including those which they find already
> in existence and those produced by
> their activity.[20]

Marx's objection is not to abstractions per se as modes of
understanding and explanation. However, he is sensitive to
the tendency for activity to fall into the grip of abstract-
ions such that they come to 'dominate' the lives of
individuals. This tendency which is ultimately a condition
of life, is manifest in theory that regards social life as
"chaotic" material from which general categories may be
distilled, effecting the move "from the conceptualised
concrete to more and more tenuous abstractions".[21]
Abstractions may then come to impose themselves upon real
life as 'guiding principles' of activity and comprehension.[22]
In this sense, dominant forms of human activity can
themselves take on an abstract ('de-natured') character.[23]

The question remains, however, as to where an alternative
can be found. One such alternative may be thought to arise
in the form of Utilitarianism. Certainly, Marx's commitment
to social change, in so far as it involves a reference to
revolutionary ends, appears to render Utilitarian
interpretations an attractive alternative. But Marx
explicitly rejects the characteristically utilitarian attempt
to secularise morality by moving its foundation from essence
to interests of certain sorts.[24] On Marx's terms, the
reduction of moral life to consequential calculations with
respect to happiness or pleasure, is another form of
abstraction. All human obligations are reduced to one
particular relationship grounded in advantage. For Marx,
this is the morality of 'civil society' - a morality which
finds its basis in instrumentalism and is consistent with
exploitation.[25] Quality in human activity is, in this sense,
given over to questions of 'productivity'. And the product
is external to that activity, gaining its value through the
relation of utility.

Entailed here, equally, is a resistance to the
possibility of variety or multiplicity: motivation and
potential are replaced with a theory. Thus, if we are
looking for a distinctive moral approach in Marx, it must

be one that escapes this general, problematic tendency to impose a one-sided framework upon a many-sided human practice. At the same time, we face a problem in respect of how the possibility of normative critique can be established when Marx resists the notion of an ideal reference by which a clear distinction between 'is' and 'ought' can be affirmed. In the context of his critique of Max Stirner in the German Ideology, Marx states that

> The Communists do not preach morality at
> all, such that Stirner preaches so
> exstensively. They do not put to people
> the moral demand: love one another, do
> not be egoists etc.[26]

The status of value in Marx is therefore uncertain. And this is borne out by his frequent attacks upon the 'moralists' of his own time.[27] On the other hand, it remains the case that Marx appears to recognise certain 'goods': Love of one's fellows, respect, altruism all appear to be valued by Marx and attach themselves to the general image of communism.[28] He nevertheless criticises Stirner's principle of altruism precisely because, for Stirner, it can only be a general principle.[29]

In order to get a firmer grip upon the implications of Marx's comments, we can refer back to the image of inversion. As we have noted, the critique of traditional ethics is at once the criticism of the 'inverted world' which makes that ethics necessary. But inverted with respect to what?[30]

We might ask here whether Marx operates with any discernible conception of man. If he does, it cannot be one understood in terms of a transcendent nature 'possessed' by each individual.[31] Rather, it can only be a dynamic conception: for Marx, our essence is to be historical beings, with the power of self-transformation. This is integrally related to the character of our material practice and the power to reproduce the conditions of our activity through the process of production.

> ...the satisfaction of the first need (the
> action of satisfying, and the instrument of
> satisfaction which has been acquired) tends
> to new needs; and this production of new
> needs is the first historical act.[32]

Our 'fixed' nature therefore must be understood as a 'species-nature'. If is from a recognition of this dynamic that we must start - the comprehension of men in their social relations and, therefore, in history. The crucial implication here is that the world, as the totality of human practice, must be understood as itself dynamic - existing not only as being but also as becoming, as possibility.

This gives us an insight into what Marx might mean by an 'inversion' of the world. It can only be understood in the context of the internal conflicts and contradictions which are constitutive of the world and which confer possibility upon it. It is only, then, in the light of the possibilities inherent in the dynamic of class struggle that the idea of a non-alienated world can appear (other than as some trans-historical moral ideal). For Marx, it has the character not of an ideal (which would carry with it a good deal of speculative conceptual baggage) but of a demand. It is in the light of this that we might understand Marx's comment that the 'utopian socialists' were able to formulate an abstract ideal of the 'just community' but could not discern

> ...in the working class the organised
> power and conscience of the movement.[33]

Thus its failure lay in the fact that it could not constitute itself as a genuine 'movement' at all. This is not because they failed to identify an independent, purely scientific, 'path' leading to the goal of socialism; rather, they failed to find the conditions of the movement in existing society, in the form of the proletariat. In this sense, Marx's critique does not readily conform to the identification of cognitive difficulties associated with the means-ends problem.

Returning to Marx's general critique, we have noted that the abstraction inherent in moral and political theory mirrors an abstraction inherent in existing social relations, relations which are symptomatic of human self-alienation. Men are reduced

> ...on the one hand to a member of civil
> society, to an independent and egoistic
> individual, on the other to a citizen,
> to a moral person.[34]

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Moral alienation is the counterpart of a general social
form. The creative and ethical capacities of human beings
are severely stunted and the exercise of such capacities is
circumscribed by the general demands of market value. Those
aspects of life which resist such circumscription (the demand
of civil society) are abstracted and formalised.

The most crucial manifestation of this alienation is
discovered, in Marx, in the form of wage-labour. Significant
labour is labour which creates a product that can acquire
economic value independent of the qualitative character of
the activity which creates it. Immanent creative potential
is thus denied significance. For the worker

> The community from which his own
> labour separates him is life itself,
> physical and spiritual life, human
> morality.[35]

He is cut off from the possibilities that make him a
creative and moral being.

Of course, modern society is constituted, for Marx, by
a _general_ alienation, manifest in the lives of _all_
individuals. But there is a significant difference in the
character of the experience with respect to different classes

> The possessing and the proletarian
> class represent one and the same human
> self-alienation. But the former feels
> satisfied and affirmed in this self-
> alienation experiences the alienation
> as a sign of its own power, and
> possesses in it the appearance of a
> human existence. The latter, however,
> feels destroyed in this alienation,
> seeing in it its own impotence and the
> reality of an inhuman existence.[36]

Within the sphere of civil society, the bourgeoisie finds the
possibility of advancement and self-expression (albeit in a
restricted alienated form) whereas for the proletariat, it
appears as the negation of _all_ possibility. The means of
self-expression is placed entirely at the service of
subsistence.

In this sense, alienation in Marx is not understood as
a straightforward a priori category. It appears in its
complete form as a concrete experience of the proletariat

> The first criticism of private property
> naturally proceeds from the fact in which
> its contradictory essence appears in the
> form that is most palpable and most glaring
> and most directly arouses man's indignation
> - from the fact of poverty, of misery.[37]

As a result, the transcendence of alienation forms itself
as the objective demand of the oppressed that they be
afforded the possibility of self-realisation and development.
A possibility which, for Marx, is systematically denied in
existing society.

Therefore, we must understand revolutionary demands as
deriving not from an external, ideal reference point but from
conflicts _internal_ to existing conditions

> No world-historic opposition is formed..
> by the statement that one is in opposition
> to the whole world...it is not enough for
> me to declare the world my opposite; the
> world too must declare me to be its
> opposite, _and_ must treat and recognise
> me as such.[38]

Here we find an essential departure in the Marxian approach
from the idea of a 'counterfactual world' as the reference
for revolutionary criticism. And in this sense, the
'radicalism' of Marx's approach differs significantly from
that generally associated with liberal forms of radical
politics. The sense of 'newness', with the attendant shadow
of arbitrariness (which Burke identifies with the French
revolution - see chapter VI) attaching to usual understandings
of radicalism is offset in Marx's approach:

> ...the problem is not some great gap
> between the thoughts of the past and
> those of the present, but the completion
> of the thoughts of the past...humanity
> is not beginning new work but consciously
> bringing its old work to completion.[39]

The process depends centrally upon an existing social power
found in a class which has an _internal_ radical character (in
the context of its 'radical chains'[40]). In this sense, the
crux is to be found in the actual or potential demands of
those who stand in one sense _outside_ society whilst existing
as a class _inside_ it. In other words, we encounter a class
which has no interest at all in the existing order of things
and whose claims constitute a denial of that order. As a
result, such claims will necessarily elude the range of

possible moral agendas existing society makes available
to its members. No such particular agenda could fully
capture the desire for wholesale social change the index
of which lies in the situation and being of the oppressed
class. Thus Marxism does not reject the idea of change,
but the foundation of such change cannot be established by
reference to arbitrary, ideal 'constructions' in the moral
imaginations of individuals - traditional understandings
of 'radicalism' (such as those Burke saw as essential to
the Enlightenment) cease to apply.

These general features of the Marxian approach have
deep implications for revolutionary politics and the sorts
of moral judgments it might involve. In order to approach
this question, we must say something about the nature of
the revolutionary class. On Marx's view, human powers have
historically found expression in the context of specific
forms of association which establish a determinate 'social
objectivity'. Such static forms, however, carry with them
the possibility of becoming a limitation upon human expression
in the light of historical change and development. Under
these conditions, the possibility of development comes to be
represented in the articulation of new sets of interests.
Established modes of association (and attendant self-
understandings) are consequently revealed to be modes of
shaping and regulating human life in accordance with
<u>particular</u> interests and the criteria of their fulfilment.[41]

Historically, therefore, ascendant classes have tended
toward the imposition of a particular set of interests upon
society. But for Marx, there is something more to be said
about the proletariat here. The interests of the proletariat
do not arise just in the broader realm of competing
particular interests. It appears as a class excluded from
all particular economic and social interests, a class which

> ...lays claim to no particular right
> because the wrong it suffers is not a
> particular wrong but is wrong in general.[42]

But what is meant by 'wrong in general' here? For Marx, the
denial experienced by the oppressed in capitalist society
cannot adequately be expressed in terms of the denial of
any particular right (we are all emancipated in political
terms). And in this sense, their position marks the limits

of the progressive character of rights. The demand for
genuine self-expression is one which existing society cannot
meet (and, in fact, is structurally compelled to deny)
despite all-embracing formal freedoms. As a result, the
proletariat have no particular moral objections upon which
to base their criticism. And this, for Marx, points to the
crucial distinction between the form of the French revolution
and that of the communist movement.

No particular ideals emerge as a yardstick of criticism.
The 'good life', the 'truly human society', resists the kind
of formulation traditionally afforded such conceptions. Ends
become instead a formal expression of a condition where
society ceases to be an imposition upon, and abstraction from,
the real powers of persons. Thus, Marx's references to the
'inhumanity' of existing conditions and the struggle for a
true human condition make sense only in the context of the
specific struggle in capitalist society.[43] Real individuals
(existing in relations and at the same time as possibility)
define what it is to be human:

> ...there can be no other measure of
> humanness than man himself.[44]

We come back, then, to the centrality of the 'now existing
premisses'.

Amongst these premisses is the oppressed class itself.
Revolution, in this way, is not simply a project that the
proletariat happen contingently to be in a position to pursue
- it is only in and through them that revolution enters on
to the agenda. And in this sense, the universalism attaching
to previous radical agendas is rejected by Marx: the agents
of its realisation are not logically interchangeable.[45]

> When the proletariat proclaims the
> dissolution of the existing world order,
> it is only declaring the secret of
> its own existence, for it is the
> dissolution of that order.[46]

This suggests that in order to investigate more fully the
moral structure of Marx's perspective, we must look at the
relevance of moral character.

As we have seen, for Marx, alienated moral life is

marked by the independence conferred upon ethical criteria,
such that moral predicates gain their substantive force in
terms of the obedience demanded by an absolute. We might
follow Becker here in noting the inadequacy of accounts
which adopt this form,

> ...there are people whose performance
> is consistently bad - even malevolent -
> but who exhibit not just regret, but
> rather a tragically accurate self-perception
> which makes us unable to call them in any
> unreserved sense, bad people.[47]

In a similar sense, it is far from clear that we can under-
stand the individual of high moral character simply in terms
of obedience to a set of principles or axioms. In both cases,
the idea of character is highly significant and this cannot
necessarily be exhausted by reference to a set of absolutes.
An openness of disposition, as we have previously noted, may
be a crucial characteristic, involving as it does the
capacity to entertain new and distinctive moral situations,
ones which might generate difficulties.

Marx's critique of established forms of moral life
suggests an impulse toward the 're-introduction' of
dimensions which appear effectively to be denied by those
structures. This impulse, for Marx, appears as internally
related to the proletariat acting "in accordance with this
being".[48] In this sense, the moral structure of revolution
takes on an essentially immanent form (reminiscent of a
notion of virtue) and character appears as a central
category.

We might usefully compare this with the view adopted
by Simone Weil in Oppression and Liberty. Individuals are
the bearers of ethical obligation and commitment and these
prove integral to the idea of re-claiming social freedom.
Weil notes the way in which the non-appearance of revolution-
ary struggle has been explained often by proclaiming the
'objective' conditions to be ripe but the 'subjective'
factor to be missing.

> ...as if the complete absence of that very
> force which alone could transform the system
> were not an objective characteristic of the
> present situation whose origins must be
> sought in the structure of our society.[49]

The tendency to effect a categorical separation between
the 'objective' and 'subjective' factors in revolution
appears to re-constitute it as an independently specified
project and in this sense represents something like a
scientific appropriation of Marxism. The agent is thereby
'purified', becoming a practical channel for the hsitorical
expression of a transcendent process. Clearly, this may
serve to reproduce the sort of alienation to which Marx's
account is intended to be a counter. We have seen that an
approach of this sort facilitates the erection of a 'party
line' as an exclusive moral criterion.[50] This, for Weil, is
the key failing in Lenin, who thinks "...in the manner of
a slave."[51]

Before exploring the implications of this more fully,
we must raise a potential difficulty. The inclusion of
factors to do with character and commitment in the general
set of social premisses of revolution might lead us to adopt
a strongly deterministic position. The character of
individuals, seen as products of their time, becomes a real
premise precisely in so far as it is constituted by reference
to transcendent social and historical determinants. In this
sense, questions of responsibility may fall away. If this is
true, then the features of Marx's thought we have so far
identified may serve as a severe limitation upon what can
significantly be said about the relationship between
particular political agency and moral judgments.

However, Marx explicitly denies the applicability of
this understanding of determinism. We can make too much of
the notion that 'everyone is just a child of his time';
> ...if this is sufficient excuse nobody
> ought even to be attacked any more, all
> controversy all struggle on our part
> cease. [52]
We must find some other way, therefore, of understanding the
determinism which Marx does assert such that people act
> ...under definite material limitations
> presuppositions and conditions independent
> of their will.[53]
And in a similar vein, he asserts that revolution does not

depend upon what "this or that proletarian or even the whole
proletariat momentarily takes to be the aim", rather, it is a
matter of what it is "historically compelled to do". In
this sense,

> Its aim and historical action is
> prescribed, irrevocable and obviously
> in its own situation in life as well
> as the entire organisation of
> contemporary civil society.[54]

There is a difficulty with understanding these determinations
on a strictly causal model. It is hard to see on Marx's
account what the causal factor would be: a causal factor
requires independent identification - but Marx is concerned
to emphasise that the material conditions of activity are
wrongly understood as genuinely independent of that activity;
rather, they are generated, sustained and transformed by
conscious human activity. Thus, productive forces are
"...the result of practical human energy." [55]

In a similar way, those facets of social life which
appear as independent of men are in fact products of human
self-alienation:

> The worker produces capital and capital
> produces him, which means that he
> produces himself; man as a worker, as
> a commodity, is the product of this
> entire cycle.[56]

And similarly,

> ...although private property appears
> to be the basis and cause of alienated
> labour, it is rather a consequence of
> the latter, just as the goods are
> fundamentally not the cause but the
> product of confusions of human reason.[57]

The independence from man of certain aspects of the social
world is an appearance (the appearance of a contingently
alienated reality) and this can be nothing other than the
self-alienating activity of human beings.[58]

However, even if we cannot ascribe a general techno-
logical or productive determinism to Marx, we still face
the question of the freedom of the individual in the light
of conditioning factors - which now appears as the relation
between the individual and collective social practice

This conditioning relationship may be said to constitute a denial of freedom; but we must consider what conception of freedom we are working with.

A highly 'voluntaristic' conception of freedom on which the suggestion of social determinants would necessarily constitute a denial of freedom reveals itself to be problematic. Its consequences must ultimately involve the rejection of references to substantive character in any assessment of freedom; and in this sense, it points toward a highly formal conception of individuality. Entailed here must be the specification of all deliberate action as an immediate index of freedom. Distinctions between what one wants (either immediately or ultimately) to do and what one does are thereby blurred. In this way, the locus of freedom is defined by individuals able to detach themselves at will from social relations (social relations cannot in any direct sense, point a gun at one's head).

As Sasseen points out, if we take this notion of freedom as exhaustive, we are limited to a formal assumption that allows no room for real assessment or differentiation.[59] In this sense, to stake anything further upon this conception may be to leave us with something essentially vacuous with respect to politics and morality.

This is not to say that a fundamental freedom of this sort cannot be assumed - and it appears that Marx would accept this. Man's life-activity

> ...is not a determination with which
> he directly merges... Only because of
> this his activity is free activity.[60]

But this species characteristic does not act as a compelling index of social freedom.

When regarded as ultimate, the voluntaristic conception relies upon a sharp distinction between what we might term the fundamental ontological freedom of the individual and any form of determinant. Matching this distinction is a sharp dichotomy between nature and convention such that the social (conventional) determination upon the life of the individual

must be regarded as entirely <u>contingent</u> to the <u>idea</u> of the
life of the individual. If it were regarded as in any way
essential, or constitutive, this must automatically be
categorised as the <u>denial</u> of 'natural' freedom and therefore
as a full-blown determinism. The image of the natural free
individual abstracted from all social existence is obscure
and sits uneasily with an examination of social agency (and
ultimately of self-consciousness).[61]

In the light of this, it appears that we can consistently
hold to the idea of a social 'determination' with respect to
agency without denying the notion of individual freedom of
action and hence of a notion of responsibility. And further,
<u>some</u> claim of this kind may be necessary to the idea of
intelligible, self-conscious agency. Marx takes this
consideration further by regarding the idea of freedom as
<u>relevant</u> only when we come to consider the sorts of relations
that pertain between the humanly created social world within
which people act and the individuality of the latter:

> In imagination individuals seem free
> under the dominance of the bourgeoisie
> because their conditions of life seem
> accidental. In reality, of course, they
> are less free because they are more
> subjected to the violence of things.[62]

When social freedom is understood on the model of a simple
'ontological freedom', we are left only with the 'shadow' of
a genuine social freedom - its purely 'formal' expression
replaces its real appearance.

Returning to the issue of proletarian action, the idea
of taking responsibility for their actions becomes not just
a possibility but a necessary condition for genuine
revolutionary politics. The point here is that the primacy
afforded to pure individual freedom and responsibility cloaks
the problematic relationship between men and the world they
create (an alienated relation). In this sense, the point of
revolution as an overcoming of alienation requires the
practical assertion by the proletariat of a 'reclamation'
of society (and hence of the conditions of action) by its
members. The 'inscribed' character of the position of the
proletariat and the possibilities this generates confers

upon them the necessity of taking responsibility for what they do. This becomes an essential element of the qualitative expression entailed by the idea of revolution.[63]

So far we have only spoken in a general way about the relation between the ethical basis of revolution and immanent moral possibilities in Marx. In order to see how this issues out substantially for moral judgment and its significance for politics, we need to look more closely at what precisely, on Marx's view, is conferred upon the oppressed and what sorts of moral perspectives result. As we have noted, on Marx's account, the proletariat as a class are in an important sense 'excluded' from the society in which, nevertheless, they generate the wealth. But, for Marx, it is this very privation (revolving around the purchase of creative capacities) which is productive of possibility. The oppressed,

> ...robbed thus of all real life-content,
> have become abstract individuals, but who
> are, however, only by this fact put into
> a position to enter into relations with
> one another as individuals.[64]

As individuals, they can find no genuine possibility of self-development through the mechanisms of bourgeois society. Relations between them cannot ultimately be mediated by particular interests and so <u>recognition</u> can only develop in a manner unmediated by associated alienating categories.

For the bourgeoisie, on the other hand, the collective life of the class is

> ...a community to which individuals
> belonged only as average individuals,
> only in so far as they lived within the
> conditions of existence of their class
> - a relationship in which they
> participated not as individuals but
> as members of a class.[65]

Cohesion, for the bourgeois, becomes a reality only in so far as its members put aside their individuality which is expressed through particular interests. They unite under the imperative of a generalised (aggregated) interest - and of an abstract ethics which compels them only as 'average individuals'.

The central distinction, then, is one between immanent
and abstract forms of social and ethical commitment which
appear in the context of particular forms of association.
The proletariat is "...revolutionary or it is nothing"[66] -
individual possibility and social (or class) cohesion are
rendered interdependent in a manner unavailable to the
intrinsically egoistic bourgeois character. The distinction
is, for Marx, confirmed by material and economic experience:

> ...poverty is the passive bond that lets
> man feel his greatest wealth, his fellow
> man, as a need.[67]

The crucial question here is what this means for moral
qualities or capacities.

When writing about the Paris commune of 1871, Marx
characterises its participants thus:

> ...heroic, self-sacrificing, enthusiastic
> in the sentiment of its herculean tasks..
> Manly, stern, fighting, working, thinking
> Paris. Magnanimous Paris.[68]

A certain sort of virtue is thus attached to the proletariat
which appears, for Marx, to derive from their life-experience.
The "harsh but hardening school of labour"[69] generates the
possibilities of considerable heroism and self-sacrifice
springing from a moral 'magnanimity' foreign to the committed
bourgeois (who are "sceptical.. egotistical"[70]). The
oppressed have the ability to apply a particular 'strength
of character' the moral basis of which eludes the grip of
abstract principle.

The political dimension to Marx's distinction here is
prominent. For the proletarian, the assertion and expression
of class identity including its moral articulation is
equivalent to the revolutionary demand.[71] In this sense, we
can detect a clear connection between the self-expression of
individuals and the facilitating context provided by the
community of the class. The capacity for heroism, self-
sacrifice and other virtues therefore finds its consummation
in revolutionary political action.[72]

At first sight, this may suggest a certain moral
'self-abandonment'; a loss of self in commitment to the cause.

But we have seen enough to assume a distinction between this
approach and the form of 'fanatacism' we have identified as
an implication in rather different ethical perspectives.
The abstractions involved in the 'fanatical' perspective
appear precisely as a primary target of Marx's critique.
For Marx, revolutionary association represents the possibility
of discovering modes of immanent moral expression; and in
this sense, is suggestive of a reference point by which
connections can be made between personal resources and moral
expression. Equally the Paris commune was not just 'heroic'
and 'magnanimous' but 'thinking' as well.

Again, Simone Weil proves sensitive to this issue: she
notes that a crucial virtue in relation to revolutionary
action is that of honesty. The possibility of concerted,
creative action depends upon an energy or enthusiasm deriving
from felt responsibilities or commitments. This kind of
responsibility,

> ...depends...on intellectual honesty,
> an infinitely precious virtue which
> prevents one from lying to oneself in
> order to avoid discomfort.[73]

The possibility of generating an account which is derived
not from ideals or principle but from questions of character
allows us to differentiate between modes of political reason
and justification. The virtue of intellectual honesty is
crucial in making these sorts of distinctions. Again, we
find Marx seeking to relate questions of character to
differing class experiences:

> The bourgeois is accustomed to regard
> the interests lying immediately in front
> of his nose as 'reality'...this class has
> in fact made compromises even with
> feudalism while the working class in
> the very nature of things must be
> honestly 'revolutionary'.[74]

The immediacy of this interest renders 'realism' the
predominant mode of reasoning about and comprehending the
world for the bourgeois. In this context, the honesty
characteristic of the proletarian is easily abandoned.

But 'honesty' here seems to imply more than simply a
resistance to 'compromise' on the grounds of immediate
interest or the minimization of risk. It also suggests

resistance to idealistic forms of self-deception. Thus,
Marx criticises the "theatrically vain" social democrat
Lassalle, who was "seduced" by the idea of leading the
working class to immediate gains through political
compromise: Lasalle was not personally corrupt but was
naive in his desire to effect immediate victory himself
and was consequently unable "to be critically true to
himself".[75] He abstracted himself as a political agent out
of the true conditions of activity and the result was a
combination of wilful idealism and realist politics.

This combination, which appears to result from Lasalle's
self-deception, implied equally that 'honesty' in this context
issues out in more than one way. The unwillingness to
compromise may be consistent with 'fanatacism': however,
when we combine this with Marx's critique of abstract ideals,
it takes on a slightly different character. And this
renders Weil's reference to intellectual honesty significant.
Idealism is conducive to the avoidance of discomfort - and,
as we have seen, to a consequent realism of its own. The
idea of an 'honesty' which is also critical of the
justificatory power of ideals must entail entertaining the
possibility of moral difficulty.

We can take this issue further by looking at precisely
how character becomes relevant with respect to revolutionary
morality. Marx is keen to resist the 'idealization' of the
working class;

> Their material privation dwarfs their
> moral as well as their physical stature.[76]

To understand what this means and its implications, we might
refer to Marx's analysis of the 'moralistic' novel
The Mysteries of Paris by the socialist writer Eugene Sue,
in The Holy Family.[77]

The prostitute Marie is a character whose conditions of
life have been constituted by poverty and misery, but she
nevertheless displays

> ...great vitality, energy, cheerfulness,
> elasticity of character - qualities which
> alone explain her human development in her
> inhuman situation.[78]

She is able to enter into the social world only in the
most alienated manner - a manner which morally debases her.
This underlies her resistance to the moral conventions of
her society.

However, precisely because of the nature of her life
and situation, her 'humanity' is a product of her deepest
personal resources 'in the face of the world'. She is not
as such a moral person, but she is able to generate
considerable humanity through the very 'elasticity' of her
character, which confers upon her the capacity to cope with
her circumstances in a 'human' way rather than through
abstract prescriptions.

> Good and evil in Marie's mind are not the
> moral abstractions of good and evil. She is
> good because she has never caused suffering
> to anybody, she has always been human toward
> her inhuman surroundings...Her situation is
> not good because it does her unnatural violence
> because it is not the expression of her
> human impulses...She measures her situation
> in her life by her own individuality, her
> natural essence, not by the ideal of good.[79]

She is done 'unnatural violence' in so far as her situation
forces ignominies and debasements upon her in the form of
social conditions that are entirely alienating with respect
to her own being. It is only as a person, as a substantive
character in relations with others (her 'natural essence')
that she expresses herself ethically. This is the
significance, for Marx, of Marie's moral condition.

When she is given a 'moral education', however, the
situation is radically altered: She comes to judge herself
in a 'rigid' manner. Her debased situation which formerly
constituted for her a way of drawing upon her own resources,
becomes the object of absolute condemnation.

> The external debasement becomes her
> internal essence as the consciousness
> of sin (conscience).[80]

The 'reformed' Marie is self-tortured, coming to regret her
new-found 'purity'.[81] In the context of the realities of her
life, this 'purity' becomes the source of categorical self-
indictment. Marie experiences a certain 'loss' in the course
of her reform. Her former depth of moral character and

substantive moral self-expression, expressed in her struggle
with the inhumanity of the world, is negated for the purposes
of judgment. She comes to regard herself in abstraction.

A similar theme attaches to the plight of the murderer
Chourineur, who is reformed and is subsequently used as an
'agent provocateur'. He loses his former self-esteem and
becomes a devoted servant of his reformer, who refers to him
as a 'dog':

> Till his very last breath Chourineur will
> find the motives for his actions not in his
> human individuality, but in that label.[82]

He loses his personal moral energy, becoming impotent in the
face of his reformer's moralistic judgments. Moreover, his
subsequent career as an 'agent provacateur' reveals a deeper
moral failing. The reformer convinces him, by "casuistry"
that

> ...a foul trick is not foul when it is
> done for 'good moral' motives...For the
> first time in his life he commits an act
> of infamy.[83]

Chourineur's newly-acquired moral sense generates the
possibility of forms of unrepentent deceit and betrayal which
previously were alien to him. The categorical ends of his
activity become its absolute justification.

There are two riders we should attach to Marx's
treatment here. First, neither Marie nor Chourineur can be
said to fit easily into the role Marx characterises as
typically proletarian. Nevertheless, they are both in their
particular ways alienated and oppressed by society, unable
to give their lives genuine meaning or possibility. In this
sense, their cases have more general implications. Second,
we cannot readily see either Marie or Chourineur as in any
sense 'paragons of virtue' prior to their reform. The life
experience of these characters does not generate a straight-
forward moral superiority: They are in crucial ways
'de-humanized'. However, for Marx, what is conferred upon
them in a positive sense is a potential deriving from the
form of moral self-expression they adopt. And this appears
ultimately as a revolutionary potential.

We are now in a position to draw some general conclusions concerning the moral rationale Marx ascribes to revolution and the sorts of positive moral claims that might result. This will provide a basis for a more direct consideration of related problems in political morality. We have seen how Marx distinguishes the general form of proletarian morality from those of bourgeois ethics; but how does this issue out with respect to positive moral claims? Marx describes the proletariat as "...within depravity, an indignation against this depravity".[84] At the root of their experience appears to be a systematic loss of dignity.

As Kolnai suggests, 'dignity' can be understood as a complex notion in so far as it has both moral and aesthetic connotations. It implies an evaluative claim which is nevertheless indicative of something fundamentally descriptive. In this sense, we get the impression of something like an "ontological value".[85] There is a prima facie resemblance here with claims concerning human rights. However, Kolnai suggests a distinction: the descriptive dimension to the idea of dignity is not immediately legalistic in the sense suggested by references to rights. The legalistic demand for recognition appears to enter into the very definition of a right whereas the failure to recognise the dignity of others appears as much as a defect as an offence.[86] To deny another's rights implies the contravention of a normative rule given by those rights. The existence of the rights concerned (as formal claims) is never in doubt.[87] On the other hand, it seems possible to 'remove' the dignity of another, or to lose one's own, in a more substantive (perhaps observable) way. Equally, we can detect a degree of reciprocity involved in the removal of dignity, such that a 'loss' of a certain kind may be experienced not only by the victim but by the culprit as well.[88]

But this does not appear to supply any clear way of formulating the moral demands of the oppressed. Theories of rights may appear to be on stronger ground precisely because

they generate claims which are necessarily <u>persistent</u> in the face of offence. But we can usefully refer back to Kolnai here: he suggests a further broad distinction between the descriptive/ontological and the active/qualitative dimensions to the concept of dignity. The former is understood as referring to a 'fundamental' dignity involved in being a human being; the latter is associated with the character of a life and the cultivation of certain sorts of virtues.[89] Corresponding to this must be a distinction with respect to the manner in which dignity may be lost or threatened.

When we consider the loss of dignity experienced by victims of torture and the loss attaching to those who condone the institutionalised torture in a brutal regime, some distinction seems possible. In the former case we might identify a loss of 'human dignity' whereas in the latter case the central loss appears better characterised in relation to 'qualitative' dignity. The victim may retain a <u>higher</u> degree of 'qualitative' dignity than do his torturers or those who support them.[90]

In this sense, the essence of the distinction refers to the aspects of being human to which different dimensions of dignity might be attached. 'Human dignity' appears to be threatened in the context of 'external' forces – where the individual is subjected to alien imperatives which serve to remove responsibility, self-expression and human recognition (where 'recognition' is understood to apply to a subject rather than simply to an object).[91] Qualitative expression of dignity, on the other hand, appears as something that is associated with the conduct of a life and questions of characteristic virtues.

This sort of distinction bears comparison with the distinction we found Marx making between class experiences in modern society. The proletariat experience a loss of self through the appropriation of essential powers – the threat to dignity has a 'fundamental' character (a debasement). The bourgeoisie are 'at home' in the world, expressing themselves through existing sets of criteria.

For Marx, such criteria are constitutive of an individual-
istic life which resolves itself into questions of self-
interest. It is thus a life lacking in positive virtue. In
a similar way, Kolnai regards 'meritriciousness' as a
paradigmatic failing indicative of the loss of 'qualitative'
dignity - an "intimate unity of abstract self-seeking and
qualitative self-effecement".[92] The world is re-constituted
as a context for individual utilities and possibilities of
self-transcendence or commitment are thereby eroded. Those
characteristics we might take uncontraversially to be
constitutive of qualitative dignity - non-servile self-
transcendence, immunity to corruption, honesty, seriousness -
to not easily square with an egoistic approach.[93]

Returning to the cases of Marie and Chourineur, the two
both appear subject to a loss of 'human dignity' in so far
as their lives are governed by hostile external conditions.
But Marx, as we have seen, wants to make more of their
condition in that it confers upon them an ethical possibility.
And his comments reflect what we have said about 'qualitative'
dignity - the development of a virtue which the conditions of
bourgeois life tend to deny. Although their reform effectively
removes this potential, displacing depth of character by
reference to formalised moral categories. Their loss of
dignity is therefore <u>complete</u>: Chourineur, we remember,
becomes an 'obedient dog'.

In this sense, we can usefully understand Marx's
affirmation of the application of positive virtues as one
which finds its consummation in the indignation against the
debasement of oppression. Thus, the ethical character of
revolution may be understood in the qualitative definition
of the revolutionary process itself. Questions of class and
of moral character reveal themselves to be fundamental to
this kind of claim.[94]

The effect of this formulation of revolutionary ethics
is to confer a qualitative character upon the judgments and
justifications entailed by revolutionary politics. The
absolute sanction given by ends, which might generate a pure

historical consequentialism is rendered suspect on Marx's
account. Marx provides no clear, ideal formulation of
social ends that could serve to generate moral calculations
of this sort.

For Marx, the revolutionary movement must

> ...avoid restoring society as a fixed
> abstraction opposed to the individual.[95]

And correspondingly, the proletariat have "...no ready-made
utopias to introduce...no ideals to realise."[96] This has
implications for the sorts of moral judgments available to
the revolutionary. The instrumentality we have noted in
relation to some subsequent Marxist approaches appears to
rely ultimately upon consequential justifications with
reference to ends. However, Marx's formulations belie this
straightforward mode of justification; immanent questions
of virtue, character and moral self-consciousness intervene
in the definition of the revolutionary process so as to
de-throne the means-ends calculation as the primary moral
reference.[97]

In the light of these general considerations, we can
now say something more direct about the question of political
morality. Our characterisation so far has centred upon the
general moral rationale attaching to revolution - and the
form of this rationale is significant with respect to more
particular moral considerations. Traditional instrumental
views of political morality tend to impose themselves in a
direct way on particular political agency. Overarching
justifications, as we have seen, tend to supply a mode of
moral reasoning which abstracts away from immediate
qualitative reservations and differentiations with respect
to political means. But the immanent character of Marx's
ethics implies a more complicated account of its relation
to political particularity. The introduction of references
to moral virtue and character equally suggest a deepening
of this issue: and as we have seen, may facilitate a
treatment of the question of moral limits.

The reference to social change which underlies Marx's
account cannot be regarded in terms of any automatic

historical teleology.[98] As the proletariat develop as a
self-conscious class, therefore,

> The interests it defends become class
> interests, But the struggle between the
> classes is a political struggle.[99]

Marx's political writings manifest a concern with specific
issues and 'transitional' aims. He is prepared to entertain
limited objectives in the context of the immediate struggle
in hand. Equally, the articles on German politics reveal
pre-occupations with press censorship, taxation and political
representation.[100] But the distinction between revolutionary
and 'realist' politics is always maintained.[101] And in this
sense, the moral implications attaching to political agency
have a persisting relevance for Marx.

Political tactics are central to the revolutionary
struggle, but frequently Marx is concerned to place them in
an immediate moral context: Thus, on the Weavers' strike
in France, he notes that,

> The miscarriage of that economical
> revolution was largely compensated
> for by its moral results.[102]

Equally, in reference to candidates in political elections,

> Workers must put up their own candidates
> to preserve their independence to gauge
> their own strength...The progress which
> the proletarian party will make by
> operating independently in this way
> is infinitely more important than the
> disadvantages resulting from the presence
> of a few reactionaries in the representative
> body.[103]

The relationship between morality and tactics is rendered
complicated by the recognition of immanent moral dimensions
to revolution. And this has implications for the
responsibilities of the revolutionary political agent.
Revolutionary politics entails severe struggle and, in certain
circumstances, the exercise of power. These features suggest
that 'dirty hands' problems emerge when we remember that the
moral character of revolutionary agents is relevant to the
political project itself.

It is useful at this point to return to our original
example of hostage-taking on the part of the Paris Commune.
We noted that Marx's analysis of the case affords us no clear
means of resolving the moral ambiguity attaching to the

actions of the Commune. The idea of moral multiplicity is
therefore retained. And this sort of analysis can clearly
b understood to bear a relation to the sorts of distinctions
with respect to moral character we saw Marx making between
the ethical self-conceptions available to different classes.[104]

It is worth noting, however, that ultimately Marx draws
the conclusion that the _real_ murderer of the Archbishop was
Thiers - and this on the grounds that he pressurized the
Commune to the point where they had little choice but to take
the action they did. In this sense, Marx does not wish to
condemn the Commune; although nor does he offer a mode of
judgment which would serve to nullify the moral connotations
of the action - and it must therefore remain a hard decision
for the Commune to make (and one to be taken only in the
context of extreme pressure). The crux of the matter appears
to lie rather in the moral _approach_ of a Commune. A certain
sort of reluctance to engage in this action emerges as
something to be valued in comparison with what Marx character-
ises as the entirely instrumental approach of Thiers who,
Marx suspects, reasoned that, "...the Archbishop would serve
his purpose best in the shape of a corpse".[105]

The distinctions and multiplicities involved in this
example are suggestive of a 'dirty hands' problem.[106] In order
to see how we might generalise from the example, it is useful
to raise again the question of limits. Considering first
the question of 'external' limits to the problems: clearly,
in our example, the Commune acted in order to protect itself
in the face of Thiers' army. Particular interests or personal
motives do not prove relevant. In this way, the limits to
the problem itself are fairly clear here. In contrast, Marx
criticises Thiers for making "...the same denunciations of
political and private enemies".[107] The issue of 'internal'
limits may prove slightly less straightforward.

The possibility of 'internal' limits depends, as we
have seen, upon the retention of an immediate moral
sensibility - there must be some means of making different-
iations with respect to particular political actions.

Referring back to our original example, we can assess
whether Marx is able to keep to these conditions. It
appears to remain the case for Marx that where necessity
places imperatives upon revolutionary agents, other ways of
seeing the actions concerned may remain relevant. In this
sense, moral differentiations seem possible. Marx draws a
parallel between the conduct of Thiers' forces and the
dictatorships of ancient Rome; both displayed the same "cold-
bloodedness" and "...the same disregard, in massacre, of age
and sex...the same indifference for the butchery of entire
strangers to the feud."[108] Distinctions are implied, then,
with respect to victims, their nature and their relationship
with the political conflict.

Clearly, however, the sorts of immediate moral consider-
ations which Marx brings to bear in order to make these
distinctions are difficult to re-formulate as strict moral
rules or principles. It is hard to see what firm criteria
there could be for the application of abstract rules. Rather,
the comments we have considered suggest that although
undesirable actions may be required by politics (and to shirk
from them may be "indulgent") a distinction remains between
this requirement and a perceived necessity of engaging in
morally suspect activity without reservation or discrimination.
The sensibility which generates this distinction implies the
possibility of limits.

There appears, however, to be a need for some criterion
here upon which discernments might rest; but Marx gives us
nothing very definite in this respect. His analyses tend
to proceed from the situation itself rather than from
assumptions strictly external to that situation. And this
is consistent with his general approach to the issue of
revolutionary ethics, the criterion of which is referred back
to the immanent moral challenge presented by the revolutionary
class.

The general implication stemming from Marx's comparisons
between the ethical character of the Commune and that of the
bourgeoisie is indicative of a certain brand of moral
constancy on the part of the revolutionaries, contrasted with

the instrumentality of their opponents.[109] Marx's resistance
to 'moralism', however, indicates that this 'constancy' is
not explicable in terms of a priori prohibitions. Rather,
it appears in terms of collectively generated expressions
of 'magnanimity' or virtue.[110]

We shall examine the more general implications of this
sort of ethical approach later; for now, we can note some
features of a notion of moral consistency, in terms of
virtue, with respect to political agency. The idea of moral
multiplicity becomes tolerable in so far as it speaks of a
problem which is not readily resolvable into one of
theoretical contradiction (which theoretical ethics finds
intolerable); it rather appears as a question of practical
ethics (to which the idea of 'practical wisdom' may be
relevant) - in this sense, for the moral agent, dealing with
the difficulty does not require a negation of the difficulty.
As we have seen, this has crucial implications for the idea
of moral consciousness and identity in practice.

In so far as Marx may be understood to pose an 'immanent'
picture of moral life against the abstract ethics he
considers typically bourgeois, implications emerge for the
possibility of remaining sensitive to the moral difficulties
generated in politics. And as a result, distinctions can be
drawn between Marx's perspective and subsequent Marxist
approaches, in theory and in practice, with respect to
political morality.

Crucial to this distinction is the question of the
nature of the moral judgments that underlie revolutionary
claims. We have seen that Marx's perspective upon revolution
distinguishes itself from a 'utopian' formulation of moral
or historical ends and, in this sense, resists an adherence
to pure consequentialism. Marx seems to understand revolution
as an 'expressive' process or undertaking grounded in the
moral capacities available to the revolutionary class. This
does not dissolve questions of tactics or the requirement for
consequential considerations. The point however is that
such judgments do not appear to exhaust the moral perspective
upon which the political project is founded (or what is

morally available to its agents). It is in this sense that
moral ambiguities or conflicts can consistently be
entertained. The qualitative dimension attaching to
revolution runs against a categorical separation between
moral individuality and political justifications.

Conflicts are not ruled out - and Marx's treatment of
the Commune hostages suggests one way such problems could
arise. The demand for self-expression appears at the same
time as a revolutionary political demand; and this creates
the possibility of ambiguities internal to the revolutionary
project itself. This is so in that the moral rationale of
revolution (as a political enterprise) depends upon the moral
character of agents. Lukács notes that revolutionary political
judgment, in so far as it retains its moral sense, cannot be
understood

> "...as the result of purely subjective
> deliberations where, that is, the
> individual concerned acts 'to the
> best of his ability and in good faith'."[111]

The moral possibility accruing to individuals is, as we
have seen, tied up with the demands associated with their
class - and in the case of the proletariat these are
revolutionary demands. This specifies the possibility of
moral difficulty for the agent as conflicting self-expressive
imperatives are encountered. Put in another way, as a
revolutionary political agent, one is also a moral individual;
and it is crucial to Marx's account that these two dimensions
are not practically separable (even though they can be
distinguished theoretically and identified with varying
imperatives).[112]

It is worth raising one further potential difficulty
here. Given the commitment to radical social change, we
might be tempted to say that the recognition of a moral
sensibility which generates difficulty in reference to
political action constitutes only an 'ideological indulgence'.
The radicalism of the revolutionary process, whereby people
rid themselves of "the muck of ages"[113],implies an undermining
of substantive moral sensibility.

The relationship between revolution and history is

relevant here. Marx does attach value to the development
of human capabilities (in the context of increasingly all-
round or 'many-sided' social relations) in capitalist
society, albeit in an alienated form:

> "...the most general abstractions
> generally develop only with the
> richest concrete development"[114]

Previous human development, and its determinate aspects, is
not irrelevant to social change. And in this sense, human
history manifests a 'coherence' amenable to re-construction.

Understandings available to people in existing society
are relevant to the moral possibilities represented in
revolution. As we have noted, Marx regards revolution as
positing no new ideals or values; and its main premise is to
be discerned in existing society in the form of the
proletariat. Further, Marx's conception of history is not
necessarily inconsistent with the idea of historically
persisting human attributes and perspectives.[115]

This explains the absence in Marx of the suggestion of
an amoralism consistent with the rejection of all moral
assumptions. Rather, the emphasis is upon the imperative,
in the face of hostile social conditions, to adopt an ethical
approach which preserves and expresses the human dignity of
those who suffer in those conditions.[116] Thus, revolution
appears as an attempt to re-constitute ourselves as genuine
(immanent) ethical beings. And at the same time, it must
constitute a demand on the part of social beings for a
foundation to this self-expression.[117]

Again, this hints at the source of possible 'dirty
hands' problems associated with revolutionary politics.
Agents engaged in the political struggle may face the kinds
of moral multiplicity incumbent upon moral individuals who,
in a similar way, face political imperatives that make
demands upon their moral being. The particular 'elasticity'
of character Marx associates with the proletariat is
suggestive of the possibility of resisting abstraction and of
adopting a form of moral consciousness which allows the
recognition and shouldering of moral burdens in politics.

The moral resources called upon here imply a resistance to corruption (implied by a blurring of 'external' limits to the 'dirty hands' problem) and also to forms of 'fanaticism': 'Internal' limits may thereby become coherent, not in the form of 'moralistic' limitations but by reference to a collectively derived integrity - a factor which is relevant in so far as the revolutionary project belongs to its participants and not to 'history'.[118]

One way in which such moral sensibility might make itself felt in terms of the relationship between agency and policy. Marx's comments in respect of the Paris Commune suggest a distinction between the preparedness to take particular, severe measures under conditions of urgency or imperative and the adoption of such measures in the form of institutionalised and potentially habitualised policy. The latter appears typical of highly instrumentalised political consciousness and tends toward the sacrifice of the bearing of ethical sensibility (in terms of revolutionary practice, this would involve the transformation of its effective practice into an abstract ethic).[119]

This equally prompts a further question with respect to revolutionary politics. To the extent that it is a project which may entail the exercise of political power, the sorts of moral difficulties we have identified as bearing upon public agents are once again relevant.[120] Of course, Marx wishes to draw a distinction between the form and significance of power as it appears in a revolutionary context and its traditional manifestations. The former appears as a power aiming at its own obsolescence. Nevertheless, characteristic problems may still arise in relation to the idea of authority, political judgment and moral different- iations with respect to the roles and responsibilities of agents. And in these kinds of cases, questions about the moral sensibilities of agents become crucial again, in respect of the possibility of recognising real 'dirty hands' problems.

The aim of this chapter has been to provide a particular perspective upon the writings of Marx which emphasises the

ways in which is speaks constructively about the relationship
between political action and morality. To this extent,
equally, a scrutiny of Marx's comments on this issue serves
to distinguish his perspective from other Marxist approaches
which have more readily adopted certain of the underlying
assumptions which may generate a moral arbitrariness in
practice (especially in so far as these perspectives are
given a radical edge).

We have already noted the manner in which the sorts of
ethical pictures which pose alternatives to that problematic
tradition engender a renewed emphasis upon the relationship
between moral individuals as bearers of substantive virtues
and their moral and political community.[121] Marx's analysis
of the revolution   and its moral expression in the
particular form of the Commune are indicative of such an
emphasis.[122] In this sense, important questions arise with
respect to the relationship between what we have said about
moral judgment and the idea of politics in a human community.

What we have noted with respect to Marx on political
morality may appear irrelevant to this question in so far as
his conception of a social movement implies the transcendence
of politics.[123] Certainly, Marx is committed to the abolition
of political forms understood as characteristically
bourgeois - where political institutions become (at least in
appearance) 'independent' of society, as a function of the
'will', and where, as a consequence, men as political beings
are only abstract citizens. On the other hand, we have seen
that Marx's political comments frequently have implications
with respect to the idea of a 'political life' and therefore
are suggestive of questions concerning the formal conditions
entailed by the idea of individuals being able to re-establish
their control over society; a process which is not possible
without a 'community'.[124]

In this sense our consideration of Marx, and its
relation with our previous discussions, may lead us to further
considerations with respect to the idea of a political
community which can incorporate those features of moral self-
understanding we have found to be essential in respect

of 'dirty hands' problems.[125] The problem of retaining
self-conscious references to moral character in the
context of a community becomes relevant. And in this
respect, issues of 'participation' and 'citizenship'
are important. In the next chapter we shall examine
their bearing upon the essential problems of political
morality.

1. See Engels' speech at Marx's graveside: K.Marx and
   F.Engels (1968) p.429
2. cf. L.Colletti (1972) pp.229-236
3. I have concentrated here exclusively on the works of
   Marx or those co-authored by Marx and Engels. I have
   avoided reference to Engels' own works due to the
   complications added by the possible divergences from
   Marx's position represented in these works. For an
   account of some of the distinctions between Marx and
   Engels, see T.Carver (1980)
4. Of course, Marx's account of political morality depends
   to a large extent upon his perspective as a whole,
   including its revolutionary dimension. Thus, we need
   to refer to these; K.Marx (1974) p.230
5. ibid
6. ibid
7. ibid
8. Marx introduces the case of the Commune hostages through
   a contrast with other accusations made against the
   Commune, including that of 'incendiarism' which he
   regards as trifling. ibid
9. Neilson notes that certain moral responses may be so
   fundamental as to enter into the definition of what it
   is to be a moral agent at all. The response to
   innocence may be of this sort; and in this way, for
   example, the political agent can retain a moral aspect
   only "...if he is sufficiently non-evasive not to
   rationalise...bombing of civilians into a situation in
   which all the putatively innocent people...are somehow
   and in some measure judged guilty". K.Neilson (1971)
   pp.220-221. It is worth noting that this position is to
   be distinguished from a strictly Kantian one where the
   response which is intrinsic to being a moral agent is
   framed as an exclusive practical imperative.
   We should also note that the 'innocence' under consider-
   ation here is relative to the situation or field of
   agency. The idea of innocence as a fundamental moral
   characteristic generates a different set of problems.
   A thorough exploration of these problems is to be found
   in P.Johnson (1988)

10. K.Marx (1974) p.203

11. ibis p.202

12. The point here will not be to defend Marxism in a
    wholesale manner, but rather to suggest that the
    approach to political morality made available in
    Marx involves certain constructive dimensions. And
    in the context of radical politics, this approach may
    have a 'de-humanizing' effect. In general, the
    emphasis here will be upon the contrast with inadequate
    features of modern thinking (themselves sharpened in a
    radical context). There is also a sense in which Marx
    shares certain ways of thinking with rather different
    approaches which emphasise questions of virtue and
    moral character.

13. see K.Marx (1961) p.42

14. K.Marx (1975a) p.244

15. K.Marx and F.Engels (1968) p.57

16. K.Marx and F.Engels (1970) p.122

17. ibid p.61

18. K.Marx (1975a) p.244
    The initial atheist response to religion is only an
    "abstract philosophical philanthropy" - K.Marx (1975)
    p.90. The 'advance'represented by Feuerbach may
    represent at the same time a certain sort of 'loss'.
    As we have seen, religion is, for Marx, a form of
    alienation; it is also, nevertheless, a mode of
    observance which is self-transcending and which therefore
    provides a focus for social identifications. Its
    secularization removes its spiritually transcendent
    veil and thereby sets the terms for a highly individual-
    istic re-modelling of ethics. See Marx's comments on
    the effects of capitalism upon the 'sanctities' of pre-
    capitalist culture - K. Marx and F.Engels (1968) p.38

19. ibid
    Equally, Marx does not criticise Hegel or political
    economy simply for being wrong about reality: "Ricardo
    is allowing political economy to speak its own language
    and it it does not speak ethically, that is not
    Ricardo's fault" ibid p.121

20. K.Marx and F.Engels (1970) p.69

21. K.Marx (1975b) p.72

22. Such is the case, for Marx, in much classical political economy, which aims to arrive at general categories abstracted from the totality of social life. The result is that certain categories, removed from their position as parts of a whole take on the appearance of eternal, transcendent characteristics. The dominance of these kinds of abstractions means that the essential character of (and potential in) human activity takes on an 'external' and static form. See K.Marx (1975b) pp.46-88; see also I.Meszaros (1970) ch.4

23. This appears to be matched by considerations with respect to Marx's ontology, and the resistance to ontological atomism. As Gould notes, for Marx, 'real individuals' provide the essential components of an ontological account; where real individuals are irreducibly relational. In this sense, a strong connection can be observed between Marx's conception of the social world and the ontology of Leibniz. See C.C.Gould (1975) p.3 The idea of 'totality' thereby takes on a prominence in the light of an understanding of Marx.

24. K.Marx and F.Engels (1970) p.109

25. ibid p.110

26. ibid p.105

27. K.Marx and F.Engels (1968) pp.58-62; K.Marx and F.Engels (1970) p.119

28. cf. G.Brenkert (1983) p.73; A.Gilbert (1976) p.185; E.Kamenka (1972) p.92

29. cf. K.Marx and F.Engels (1968) p.60 As Wood notes, on Marx's view, one cannot judge capitalism by reference to some conception of 'post-capitalist' justice in any straightforward way: the latter could not be considered 'more just', each is 'just' in its own way. A.Wood (1972) p.270

30. One way of answering this might refer to the claim that Marx's earlier writings embody an idealistic' commitment which he abandons later on. The early writings appear to make reference to a notion of 'human essence' in the context of which, the revolutionary project becomes one of re-establishing a correspondence between existence and essence. Thus, the early moral idealism gives way,

in the latter works, to a 'purely scientific' historical
analysis in which revolution becomes a matter of
objective structural dynamics. Undoubtedly, there are
changes of emphasis and, to some degree, of language in
in Marx's works; but these are equally consistent with
a development of themes (Meszaros notes that Marx
retains references to 'self-estrangement' in The Holy
Family, The German Ideology, Wage-Labour and Capital,
Theories of Surplus Value and Capital. And the
criticisms Marx makes of notions of 'man's estrangement'
appear in the context of German philosophy, which treats
man as an abstraction - See I.Meszaros (1970) pp.221-227)
And in the more 'scientific' works he retains a
revolutionary commitment. The point of scientific study
is not go give a 'purely objective' account of the world
- it must become revolutionary, associating itself
consciously with the "historical movement" (See
D.McLellan (1980) p.232). The point of theory, for Marx,
is not to understand the world as an 'external' totality,
but rather to comprehend the struggle that is expressed
and developed in the activity of individuals in class
relationships.

31. K. Marx and F.Engels (1970) p.122
32. ibid p.49
33. M.Marx (1974) p.262
34. K.Marx (1961) p.241
35. K.Marx (1975a) p.418
36. K.Marx and F.Engels (1978) p.133
37. K.Marx and F.Engels (1956) p.50
38. ibid p.193
39. K.Marx and F.Engels (1968) p.38
40. K.Marx (1975a) p.256
41. An essential requirement represented in ideology is that
    of representing particular (class) interests as if they
    were universal truths.
42. ibid p.256
43. cf. A.Collier (1981) p.37. To the extent that Marx can
    be described as a 'naturalist', his naturalism has a
    distinctively negative form.
44. K.Marx (1975a) p.173

45. This also relates to Marx's view that revolution cannot be a 'purely political' event. See K.Marx and F.Engels (1970) p.89

46. K.Marx (1975a) p.256

47. L.C.Becker (1974) p.113

48. K.Marx and F.Engels (1978) p.552

49. S.Weil (1958) p.39

50. The relationship between a 'scientific' conception of revolutionary theory and an emphasis upon leadership is explored in M.Levin(1980) and R.Hunt (1975) ch.5

51. S.Weil (1958) p.31

52. K.Marx and F.Engels (1978) p.552

53. K.Marx and F.Engels (1970) p.47

54. Marx in McLellan (1971) p.33 - From The Holy Family

55. Marx in ibid p.142 - From The Poverty of Philosophy
Similarly, a machine becomes a crucial force only in the context of human needs expressed in the structure of social activity: "Torn away from these conditions it is as little capital as gold by itself is money or as sugar is the price of sugar" - K.Marx (1961) p.155. In this sense, Marx wishes to grasp human activity and its social history in itself as a development; and this is understood in terms of an internal dynamic grounded in relations which do not depend upon anything strictly external. Of course, nature may be taken to be independent of human activity: but to the extent that we apprehend and recognise nature, we have entered into a practical relation with it. And equally, for Marx, human beings are natural beings - i.e. they are part of the 'natural' world, or rather nature 'mediated with itself' through self-conscious activity. See K.Marx and F.Engels (1970) pp.121-123; see also I.Meszáros (1970) ch.6

56. K.Marx (1975a) p.335

57. ibid p.332

58. There are further questions with respect to Marx's approach which we are not able to deal with directly here. Particularly the notion of the 'primacy' of productive forces is a prominent theme. Even if the relationship here cannot be one of cause and effect, it remains the case that at least an explanatory primacy

is affirmed by Marx. A detailed argument for functionally-derived primacy is to be found in G.A.Cohen (1978) ch.VI. See also the criticism of functionalism as explanation in J.Elster (1980) and the reply in G.A.Cohen (1980)

A further issue is provided by the well-known metaphor of base and superstructure. It is important to note here that for Marx, human society is intrinsically dynamic, presenting a unity of being and becoming, which is inadequately grasped if hypostatised as a series of static relationships. Thus, to affirm at any particular stage that 'superstructural' features can be identified as 'mere effects' of the 'base' is a misleading imposition of stasis upon what is in fact dynamic. Marx certainly wants to say that ideas, the ways in which we make sense of our lives, are shaped by the general conditions of that life; in this sense, ideas do not develop independent of the totality of social practice. Equally, productive relations are not independent determinants of that totality. The fact that they may appear so (and that we may act as if they are) is a function of man's alienation from his productive life. cf. K.Marx and F.Engels (1978) p.137

59. See R.F.Sasseen (1971)
60. K.Marx (1975a) p.328
Essential to Marx's view is that we have no solid foundation upon which to assert a tenable distinction between nature and convention: "The difference between an individual as a person and what is accidental to him (forms of existence, custom, law etc.) is not a conceptual difference but an historical fact." - K.Marx and F.Engels (1970) p.180. In this sense, the attempt to render fundamental individual freedom exhaustive is rendered imperative. Maguire notes that Marx, in his political writings is frequently prepared to declare that people could or should have acted other than they did, whilst at the same time offering explanations of their actual behaviour - Maguire (1978) p.117

In general, the attempt to provide social and historical explanations of behaviour does not entail a negation of

the freedom of that behaviour. The level of generality
at which such explanations become effective renders
them necessarily distinguishable from individual
biography and the motives contained therein. We might
counter this by recalling that Marx occasionally refers
to the victory of the proletariat as 'inevitable'.
We must remember, however, that for Marx this struggle
is not to be understood simply on the model of a contest
(it is not, for example purely a struggle for power).
Although it finds its expression in political conflict
which at any particular time may go either way, it
nevertheless remains part of a deeper social movement.
This movement is the 'domain' of the proletariat who,
if they take up the challenge of self-realisation, can
at the same time change themselves and the world (and
as Cohen notes, this challenge equally depends upon
the rational perception on the part of the workers of
their own interests and a rational pursuit of those
interests - G.A.Cohen (1978) p.147). This gives a sense
of the 'redundancy' of the oppressors to whom these kinds
of possibilities are not available. The social and
ethical foundations upon which the classes enter the
arena of struggle are radically contrasting ones. Thus,
the commitment on the part of the proletariat to their
own conscious self-development contains its own guarantee
of success since the bourgeoisie do not have the
specific resources necessary to resist them on those
terms. This does not of course deny the necessity for
effort in terms of the political struggle (which remains
a battle to be won) and in terms of self-sacrifice.

61. The idea of the necessity for some informing 'background'
to thought and action might be expressed in a number of
ways. Most notably, the point may be made in terms of
language understood as a key dimension to the idea of
self-consciousness. See for example Wittgenstein's
argument against the notion of a 'private language' in
Philosophical Investigations 248-335. Equally, we can
focus upon the relationship between reasons and respons-
ibility; a crucial question in relation to responsible
human agency is what makes it possible for us to have
reasons. There may of course be reasons for behaviour
without knowledge of them (we can say this often of

animals). But a distinctively human notion (again
relating to the idea of self-consciousness) is that
having reasons that are more or less readily available
to us (prompting a complex notion of intention). In
a similar vein see Marx's examination of the
implications of the distinction between the architect
and the bee (Marx in McLellan pp.174-176)

62. K.Marx and F.Engels (1970) p.84

63. The implication here is that social conditions are
themselves ethically relevant. Eugene Kamenka regards
this as a flaw in Marx's otherwise coherent ethics of
virtue. This is so in that the idea that social
conditions are ethically relevant introduces a normative
reference to social ends which is inconsistent with
Marx's otherwise positive character-based ethical account.
The danger posed here for Kamenka is the return to an
'objectivist' historical account - See E.Kamenka (1972).
However, although Marx's concern with historical ends
in relation to social ethics and revolution is indisput-
able, the concern we have identified in Marx to relate
social demands to existing, qualitative possibilities
accruing to the oppressed, complicates the issue. The
idea of a non-alienated social life must, it seems, be
predicated upon a resistance to the need for the
formulation of a priori ideal ends. That Marx found
history "a more powerful ally" (ibid p.160) than
qualitative revolutionary potential is questionable.
For Kamenka, the intrinsically relational character of
'moralism', which poses ideal against real, is never
fully transcended by Marx due to the latter's re-
introduction of relational, utopian ends. To resolve
this question absolutely is not the point here; rather,
the point is to emphasise that strain in Marx's thought
which proves fruitful with respect to political morality.

64. K.Marx and F.Engels (1970) p.92

65. ibid p.85

66. K.Marx (1974) p.148

67. K.Marx (1975a) p.94

68. K.Marx (1974) p.268

69. K.Marx and F.Engels (1978) p.134

70. ibid

71. This appears to throw some light on the remarks of
    Victor Serge we noted in the previous chapter.

72. As Levin notes, this is equally true of revolutionary
    consciousness itself: the need for revolution is not
    necessarily self-evident to the worker. Engagement in
    struggle appears as itself an important condition of
    the development of this consciousness. See M.Levin
    (1980). It is important to note here that the appear-
    ance of a 'vicious circle' is offset by Marx's view
    that the relation between capital and labour is
    necessarily one of struggle in more or less explicit
    forms.
    This marks a central difference between Marx's approach
    and that of the 'sociology of knowledge' which draws a
    more straightforward connection between the way one sees
    the world and where one stands in it. See for example
    K.Mannheim (1946) . As Mannheim notes, his approach
    is close to a 'broadened' form of empiricism.

73. S.Weil (1952) p.195

74. K.Marx (1974) p.150

75. ibid

76. ibid p.396

77. For an analysis of Marx's approach to the novel, and the
    relationship it implies between analysis and criticism,
    see S.S.Prawer (1976). Prawer notes the sense in which
    Marx regards the novel in so far as it is a prima facie
    moral statement, as flawed on literary grounds. It is
    nevertheless understood as a basis for further analysis
    in that the characters and their relationships embody
    certain crucial features of bourgeois moral life.
    (pp. 89-96)

78. K.Marx and F.Engels (1956) p.225

79. ibid p.226

80. ibid p.232

81. ibid p.231

82. ibid p.220

83. ibid p.219

84. K.Marx and F.Engels (1978) p.134

85. A.Kolnai (1976) p.256

86. ibid p.257

87. Cohen notes that when we consider rights in relation to the powers they might match, each remains logically independent of the other, see G.A.Cohen (1978) p.219. It is worth adding here that claims concerning natural rights have traditionally been associated with references to natural law.

88. The notion of brutalization here could be viewed psychologically simply as an 'habitualization'. But to the extent that more or less reflective self-conceptions are involved, the idea of 'dignity' appears to remain relevant.

89. A.Kolnai (1976) p.260

90. ibid

91. This is not equivalent to the removal of basic freedom. One can prevent someone doing what they want without necessarily removing their dignity (although it may always place it on an uneasy footing). Equally, for example, there is more than one way in which someone might be tortured.

92. ibid p.266

93. Again, there is something of a parallel with Marx's characterisation of bourgeois life, where moral questions are 'externalized' and the combination of character and objectivity which is the condition of (non-servile) self-transcendence, the idea of ethical 'inner necessity', is attenuated.

94. K.Marx (1975a) p..208
This gives sense to Marx's comment that "We do not face the world in doctrinaire fashion, declaring 'Here is the truth kneel here!'... We merely show the world how it actually struggles."
Thus, the idea of society placed under the control of its members is to be understood as a practical, dynamic social condition rather than as an ideal system specified by some general teleology. There is room for a distinction here between Marx and Hegel : an Hegelian interpretation of Marx tends toward a greater emphasis upon historical ends. Thus, Lukács comments that it is "the actual historico-philosophical pressure of the social ideal of socialism" that provides the criterion for objective possibility - G.Lukács (1972) p.9. For a criticism of this view see I.Meszaros (1970) pp.114-119

95. K.Marx (1975a) p.91

96. K.Marx (1974) p.213

97. We might distinguish between Marx's perspective upon
     political struggle and that which affords a role to
     the professional revolutionary more readily associated
     with Lenin: See G..Scwab (1978); R.N.Hunt (1975)
     pp.248-252. At the same time there is room for
     a distinction between Marx's position and that of
     Bernstein, for whom "the movement is everything, the
     goal nothing" (Bernstein cited in R.Luxemburg (1971)
     p.52). The distinction, however, is not simply one
     between political realism and utopian idealism. Marx
     is far from willing to concede that the rejection of
     'realist' politics entails a utopian restriction to
     a projected ideal. See also L.Colletti (1972) pp.45-108.

98. Again, there is room for a contrast with Hegel here.
     Marx does not appear to affirm an 'inner nature' or
     teleology in history in anything other than an abstract,
     re-constituted sense.
     We might note in connection with this that the problem
     of 'dirty hands' is not one that troubles Hegel.
     See G.W.F.Hegel (1967) p.215
     See also C.C.Gould (1975)

99. K.Marx (1961) p..195

100. See particularly K.Marx (1973a), (1973b), (1974)

101. See for example K.Marx (1974) pp.329-359. On the
     interpretation of this distinction see the exchange
     between S.Avineri and A.Gilbert in <u>Political Theory</u>
     Vol.4 No.1 (1976)

102. K.Marx (1974) p..105

103. K.Marx (1973b) p.327

104. We can refer back here to the discussion in chapters
     IV and V. Character may have an important role to play
     in a sort of moral perspective (and hence in practical
     self-conceptions) which can tolerate the notion of
     ambiguity.

105. K.Marx (1974) p.230

106. This contrasts with the interpretation we found in
     Lukes, where justifications are necessarily 'long range'
     historical ones.

107. We might of course say the same of Thiers - although

Marx would insist that his cause was intrinsically
related to particular, monied interests.

108. ibid p.227

109. Again, there may be a mediated relationship between
theory and practice here. Ethical approaches may
issue in practical ways with respect to context. We
have already explored the results of the difficulties
presented by politics in this respect. The distance
between theory and practice is of course one which Marx
sees as deeply problematic. However, if the social
movement is grounded in the potential to be found in
the character of the proletariat, theoretical
consciousness may be thought to be extraneous to the
revolutionary process itself. But for Marx, this
difficulty appears only in so far as we view theoretical
consciousness simply as the possession of a store of
objective knowledge. On Marx's view, knowledge
constituted by an analysis of social development is not
independent of human activity and commitment. We
apprehend a reality of which we are a part and formulate
a narrative in which we are implicated. In this sense,
theoretical consciousness is at the same time a form of
self-knowledge. This is the source of Marx's comment
in the <u>Theses on Feuerbach</u> that the truth is something
which must be proven in practice.
See K.Marx and F.Engels (1970) p.121

110. Marx does not articulate any explicit theory of virtue
but as we have seen, his remarks on the character of
the revolutionary class are suggestive of positive moral
characteristics as opposed to other forms of moral
recognitions. Further, these remarks have a distinct-
ively 'classical' flavour : he describes the women of
the Commune as "heroic, noble and devoted, like the
women of antiquity" - K.Marx (1974) p.220

111. G.Lukacs (1972) p.9

112. Lukács ultimately faces difficulties in maintaining the
requirement that the agent accept "responsibility for
all his deeds" (ibid p.6) especially in the light of an
interpretation which owes much to the Hegelian system -
a system "devoid of ethics" (ibid p.7). This also
brings to mind Merleau-Ponty's reference to historical

consequentialism.

Again, Marx diverts from this position - see his
critique of "objective historiography". K.Marx and
F.Engels (1970) p.60

113. ibid p.95

114. K.Marx (1975b) p.77

115. Cohen notes that the logic of Marx's theory of historical
development and the attendant claim that 'human nature
changes in history', is not inconsistent with the idea
that there are permanent aspects to human nature. At
the least, we must assume some 'nature' by virtue of which
a given form of society shapes human behaviour in a
specific way. See G.A..Cohen (1978) p.151. This theme
is pursued from a slightly different perspective in
N.Geras (1983).

In a similar way, the idea that there is a 'coherence'
to human history implies at least the possibility of
recurrent features of human social life. In reference
to the category of 'production', Marx notes that it is
a "sensible abstraction" in that it "picks out what is
common, fixes it and consequently spares us repetition"
- K.Marx (1975b) p.51. Within this generality, there
will be more particular 'determinations', some of which
belong "to all epochs" (ibid) : N.B. Carver interprets
'determinations' here as "essential constituent or
limiting factors" ibid p.50.

The central point for Marx is not to deny persistent
features in human history but rather to resist the
temptation to isolate those features from history and
use them as the basis for transhistorical character-
isations. Marx's primary quarrel does not seem to be
with the content of traditional moral theory, but with
its (abstract) form.

116. This is related to the character of the 'hostility',
which is not just 'disadvantage' (or the denial of
rights) but rather a positive negation.

117. We can recall here that the 'virtue' of the proletariat
is at the same time socially de-based. In this sense,
the moral self-realisation which is the 'mission' of the
proletariat is equally a social struggle.

118. This points to the limitations inherent in a strict analogy between revolution and war.

119. We can compare this with certain features of the regime Koestler characterises in <u>Darkness at Noon</u>. Highly instrumentalised approaches may in certain contexts generate bureaucratic procedures which gain justification in and of themselves. cf. A.J.Polan (1988) ch. 2 and 3

120. Maguire notes that even where the state is understood as the instrument of a class, there is still room for a logical distinction between the interests and activities of the two - Maguire (1978) p.230. And in this sense, a problem might remain even where state power is in the hands of the 'universal class'.

121. We have already noted that certain moral approaches may lead to the separation of oneself as a moral agent from the moral community and that this renders questions of moral character problematic.

122. For Marx, the Commune is not the "social movement of the working class" but rather is "the organised means of action" (K.Marx (1974) p.253) Although we must keep in mind here that the qualitative dimension to revolution confers equally a qualitative dimension upon the relation between means and ends.

123. See A.J.Polan (1984)

124. K.Marx (1961) p.253
We also find Marx referring to institutions persisting but taking on a "higher form" in future society - ibid p.259

125. The extent to which a discussion of this sort is consistent with Marx's design is of course a contraversial matter (although one which is not central to the present argument). I have emphasised aspects of Marx's writings that are highly suggestive of such a discussion; and this is to emphasise that dimension to Marx which labels him, as Schwarz suggests, not simply a theorist of 'society in general' but also an observer of the commune, the city or the polis, with its emphasis upon non-instrumental forms of political engagement. See N.Schwarz (1979) p.257
It is equally the case, of course, that an emphasis upon the social-structural dimension to revolution

renders intelligible Marx's undoubted resistance to
speculating upon future society (this speculation
amounting to the formulating of utopian images).
Although it is worth emphasising here the difference
between the specification of a substantive utopia and
the identification of the formal conditions under which
a 'non-abstracted' community is possible, in terms not
of political apparatus but of human self-conceptions.
In a similar vein, Alan Gilbert notes the concern in
Marx with the issue of "moral psychology" and its
relation to questions of social activity and
participation; a concern shared by "coherent liberalism",
represented notably by Montesquieu and, more recently,
Oakeshott. See A.Gilbert (1986) p.31. In addition to
this, the influence of Aristotelian thought and themes
associated with republicanism also appears as relevant
in the location of Marxism.

IX : <u>Virtue and Community</u>

In order to deepen the themes we have established, we
can now consider in more general terms the relationship
between the moral implications of 'dirty hands' problems
and the idea of a political community. This relationship
has been hinted at in the discussion so far; and an analysis
of it will prove useful in terms of its implications for an
understanding of moral and political life. Our concern has
been to investigate the sense in which moral sensibility can
be retained in the face of serious political imperative
(itself morally grounded). This has involved critical
analysis of certain ways of theorizing moral judgment which
appear to abstract from the real moral position of a
substantive political agent and the positing of an alternative
picture of moral life which refers to a broad notion of
virtue. Further, however, this notion appeared to have an
inherent social dimension.[1]

The question of political life - and therefore of the
character of political community - demands our attention.
And when this question is posed in the context of a concern
with political morality, it prompts us to speculate upon the
requirements attaching to a political community that can
provide the moral 'space' within which 'dirty hands' problems
might be tolerated. In this sense, the question of political
life is implicated in so far as it may provide a social
foundation for the sorts of practical conceptions and
orientations we have found to be central to the idea of a
morally bearable political culture.

At this point it is worth raising certain considerations
which follow from the argument of the previous chapter. The
point there was to examine Marx with an eye to identifying
connections between the implicit concern with qualitative
moral manifestations and the conclusions drawn from prior
discussion of the general problem of 'dirty hands' in
politics. In this sense, the aim was to show what perspect-
ives might be entailed by the possibility of political agency

which takes up modern social perspectives but which finds
means of avoiding the moral vacuity (and consequent excess)
that appears characteristic of such undertakings. One
implication is an affirmation of some form of moral
'integration' such that the difficulties we have seen to
result from individualised moral outlooks when put into
political practice are overcome.

A central consideration here is articulated by Simone
Weil:

> All those who break with their
> surroundings in order to be faithful
> to what they think cause pain to
> others.[2]

The impulse to retain this particular form of 'integrity' in
the public realm may well "increase the evil one wants to
check."[3] The consequent affirmation of moral integration may
itself, however, be thought to be worrysome. The possible
implication of a 'collectivised' moral soul may cast doubt
the idea of responsible moral judgment and, indeed, upon the
possibility of any substantive political life.

Just as the adherence to a 'theorised' ethical perspect-
ive may have slightly different implications depending upon
the practical and theoretical contexts within which it is
deployed, so the same may be true of the alternative image
of an 'immanent' moral community. Burke's writings clearly
address themselves to the defence of certain morally-grounded
modes of social life he sees as being threatened (although
this does not, of course, render him immune from criticism[4])
- on the other hand, where questions of moral immanence are
raised in the context of social change (or at least of sharp
ideological disagreement) certain features of this ethical
approach may become more prominent and more problematic.

This issue is raised by A.J.Polan with respect to
Lenin's State and Revolution. The project specified in this
text is characterised by the overcoming of the dichotomy
between subjective and objective dimensions to experience
and judgment. The attempt to overcome alienation appears
initially in a theoretical form as the philosophical
condition for social harmony and agreement. The point,

however, is that Lenin's text is not an abstract, theoretical one but is politically 'active' - and its presuppositions become a basis for multiple layers of coercive power.

> If the search for identity changes
> from being a philosophical project to
> describe the world into a political
> project to change the world its
> consequences can be terrifying.[5]

To the extent that the idea of a complete identity of subject and object abstracts from the essential character of individual experience, when that idea becomes practical, it equally becomes an imposition.

Weil is equally sensitive to the problems associated with a fully homogeneous collective.

> Several human minds cannot become
> united in one collective mind and the
> expressions 'collective soul', 'collective
> thought'...are altogether devoid of meaning.[7]

Again, then, as a concrete project, the desire for homogeneity must be constructed by an authority.[8] In the light of these reservations, a renewed pressure is placed upon the idea of moral immanence with respect to communities. Some initial points emerge from these considerations. A characteristic of theoretically derived foundations for moral unity is their static form. The plurality which appears as central to human communities carries with it equally a temporal dimension - a dimension which static blueprints fail to capture; and in this sense, the requirement for coercion may be a persistent one. Thus the requirement for 'temporal sensitivity' becomes prominent with respect to a sustainable political life. At the same time, on a 'spatial' rather than a temporal level, if we are to understand what might be entailed by the idea of a moral integration that is not reducible to 'servitude', we must examine the character of the forms of moral recognition and self-conceptions which speak both of genuine moral identity and of collective participation.[9] The origin we have ascribed to these sorts of questions in this context has implications for the form of discussion such questions will prompt.

The point, clearly, is not to suggest a substantive social blueprint under the auspices of which a constructive

relationship between moral identity and collective life
might be guaranteed (nor is it the point to defend one term
in this slippery relationship against another). Rather, the
discussion must in a certain sense be a more modest one.
Learning the lesson with respect to the limits of a priori
theory in relation to morality and to political ends, the
point becomes rather one of identifying the implications of
this for an understanding of the manner in which morality
may possibly operate in a community. To the extent that this
requires us to speak about the character of politics, it
appears as a matter of tracing those features of political
life which will facilitate the recognition and sustenance
of its own moral foundations.

In order to generate a response to these questions, we
must initially give more detailed attention to the notion of
virtue, its relation to moral identity and its place in
political life. It is useful here to look to the classical
origin of such themes and in particular to the detailed
treatment of virtue, in its various manifestations, provided
by Aristotle. In his writings both on morality and on
politics, we are encouraged to consider the significance
of certain sorts of commitment which invoke an aspect of
'depth' to the judgments and responsibilities involved. In
this sense, Aristotle may speak significantly to the modern
world where such ways of thinking have been neglected,
particularly in so far as we are led toward an emphasis upon
the role of moral character in relation to social agency.

For Aristotle, the end of moral activity is a kind of
happiness synonymous with the living of a good life. On the
other hand, what constitutes the good, or moral virtue, in a
practical context is not something singular but derives from
a multiplicity of good ends which contribute to it - although
the latter are nevertheless considered good in themselves.
Before going into more detail concerning Aristotle's
perspective, it is instructive to press this general aspect
a little further.

How can things be both good in themselves and good by
virtue of being a means to a further end? Aristotle

indicates that the ultimate end of happiness cannot be subservient to anything else and yet does not negate the qualitative value of those particular ends which constitute the practical expression of virtue. In other words, its character as ultimate does not imply its independence from the means such that there could logically exist any number of other ways of achieving it. Rather, it must bear some qualitative relation with the means such that the character of the latter, considered in themselves, remains relevant. The particular ends we might formulate and which are means to the 'good life', appear as constitutive of that life and not just as its causal conditions. The relation then is something like that between a whole and its parts.

Equally, however, so see the 'good life' simply as an aggregate of the various particular moral ends does not capture Aristotle's meaning in referring to it as something truly ultimate, desired for its own sake. Rather, we are drawn toward the ascription of a particular kind of moral unity. This becomes clearer when we notice that Aristotle tends to describe the 'good life' not by reference to any definitive formulae but by reference to the life and character of the good man. Thus, the truly happy man

> ...will bear the vicissitudes of
> fortune most nobly and with perfect
> decorum under all circumstances.[10]

The definitive end of morality is not theoretical or abstract but rather is constituted in terms of a certain sort of disposition or character which displays a stability and constancy in its recognition of moral virtue. The good man does not only behave well but manifests

> ...some kind of activity of the
> soul in accordance with virtue.[11]

There is indeed a multiplicity of ends which defines our moral activity; but the unity of these ends, such that we are able to talk about virtue in a general sense (and therefore about the virtuous individual), is to be discovered in the general moral character of the individual.

Equally, for Aristotle, morality is essentially practical. We cannot equate the quality of the virtuous man with the possession of a purely 'latent' virtue

> ...it is in action that some become
> just and others unjust.[12]

And at the same time, morality distinguishes itself from the possession of some form of prior moral knowledge. Aristotle is reluctant to accept the idea of substantive, theoretical moral instruction. Rather, the Ethics appears as an attempt to elucidate the structure and character of what it is to be virtuous; the aim is to "...illustrate the invisible by means of visible examples".[13] To the extent that ethics is practical and is concerned with particulars, its application extends over an inexhaustible range of specific situations; and thus it cannot be encountered in the guise of generalised precepts. The relationship between character and action is therefore a central theme for Aristotle.

This is evidenced in Aristotle's central ethical doctrine; that of an adherence to a 'mean'.[14] The essence of virtue appears as the avoidance of either 'excess' or 'deficiency' in respect of one's response to particular situations or objects. However, what is to count as excessive or deficient response is not readily characterisable in abstract terms; it will depend upon the particularities of a situation and judgments about the 'appropriateness' of one's response. Equally, however, it is dependent upon the character of the agent: the man who knows himself will be able properly to compensate in his response for the particular bents of his character; just as the 'right amount' of food will depend upon one's constitution and size. In this sense, the reference point is "...not the median of the object but the median relative to us".[15] This does not mean that different people will have to do different things in order to be virtuous - but introducing character into the picture implies a need to adapt oneself in order to do the right thing. There remains only one way of being good although there are many ways of behaving badly. What this consists in is, as we have seen, not amenable to exhaustive theoretical characterisation. Aristotle seems rather to be showing us how it is possible to go wrong - and the central ground of error here is the disharmony between one's practical and emotional disposition and the requirements of true virtue.[16]

Thus, the 'unity' that is evident in the idea of the 'good life', given by reference to character, indicates that simply to reproduce the actions of the good man is insufficient. In reference to the just and self-controlled man, Aristotle remarks that

> ...acts are called just and self-controlled
> when they are the kind of acts which a just
> and self-controlled man would perform; but
> the just and self-controlled man is not he
> who performs these acts, but he who also
> performs them in the way just and self-
> controlled men do.[17]

It is only through a particular unity of personality and action that virtue makes its appearance in the world.

It is important to distinguish Aristotle's position from a conception of moral character as the development of a rationality which serves to transcend particular desires or passions. Whilst it is true that for Aristotle there is a rational and non-rational dimension to the soul, the two do not function exclusively. Appetite 'partakes' of reason in so far as it can submit to its guidance, but

> ...it possesses reason in the sense
> that we say it is reasonable to accept
> the advice of a father and of friends
> not in the sense that we have a
> 'rational' understanding of mathematical
> propositions.[18]

Rather than negating desire by reference to pure reason, desire is brought into a relation with reason through the operation of practical wisdom - a capacity which has to do with moral vision;

> ...the capacity (virtuous men have) of
> seeing what is good for themselves and
> for mankind.[19]

This cannot be equated with the particular sort of clarity of vision associated with a purely subjective determination or with instrumental calculation of benefits. And equally, we find here the basis for a sharp distinction between Aristotle's ethics and the a priori formulations of Kant.

We can recall that for Kant the good is derivable from reason made practical through the operation of the good will. In Aristotle, by contrast, goodness appears not through the independence of the will but through the cultivation of right dispositions integrated into a whole character.[20]

In the light of this, it is initially surprising that
Aristotle focusses upon weakness of will as a distinct moral
phenomenon. However, on inspection, Aristotle's treatment
of this problem serves to affirm the distinctiveness of his
approach. And further, it proves significant for an under-
standing of the more general social implications of
Aristotelian ethics.

How can it be that one who wishes for the good can know
precisely what ought to be done in some situation and yet
not do it? Aristotle takes issue with the Socratic response,
where the moral failure involved is in a sense translated
into a cognitive one. The failure to act is taken to be
indicative of a shortcoming in the moral knowledge at the
agent's disposal. For Aristotle, this is to theorise away
the problem - a problem that gains its weight precisely from
the fact that full moral knowledge is available to the agent,
who nevertheless fails to act.[21]

Aristotle attempts a more comprehensive explanation
through an initial distinction:
> ...the verb 'to know' has two meanings:
> a man is said to know both when he does
> not use the knowledge he has and when
> he does use it.

The morally weak man retains knowledge only in the first
sense. He knows what the right thing to do is but his
knowledge is not practical. Now this appears initially
to be unhelpful, merely reproducing the problem; but we must
remember that, for Aristotle, where the agent's knowledge is
not practical, the contingent addition of action does not
fulfil the conditions for moral virtue properly understood.

How then is moral weakness to be characterised?
Aristotle goes on to say that it represents the intervention
of immediate desire or passion into practical thinking. And
this is explained in terms of the practical syllogism; the
form of reasoning by which moral awareness issues in a
concrete application.

In this syllogistic model, the major premise, the
universal term, is given by the general claim of a virtue;

the minor premise is given by the particular perception of
a concrete object or situation. For Aristotle, it is the
latter which is "dragged about" by emotion. This looks at
first to be somewhat obscure: In what sense is perception
'dragged about' here? Aristotle remarks that the morally
weak man either does not have this minor premise or has it,
"...not in the sense of knowing it, but in the sense of
uttering it as a drunken man may utter the verses of
Empedocles."[24] But these two conditions appear radically
different. In the first case we seem to be encountering a
cognitive failure whereas in the second, the process is more
complicated. Part of the apparent difficulty here is to be
laid at the door of the practical syllogism itself as a form
of explanation.

Clearly, Aristotle is committed to the idea that if one
is in full possession of both premisses of the practical
syllogism, one cannot fail to act. If this were not the
case, it would merely reproduce a picture of thought followed
contingently by action rather than doing what it is supposed
to do (i.e. to explicate the concrete relation between the
two and the necessary translation of one into the other).
In this sense, equally, Aristotle is committed to the view
that for the practical failure that is the mark of moral
weakness to occur, one premise must in some sense be absent.
Now this might lead us to doubt whether Aristotle really
entertains the possibility of moral weakness in the context
of full knowledge. In the end, it appears to derive from
the absence of a term in the process of moral reasoning;
a vital piece of information without which moral awareness
remains in some way incomplete.

But the introduction of this syllogistic form might
mislead us somewhat. It is certainly not an ordinary
syllogism in so far as its conclusion is an action. And in
this sense it cannot be understood simply as an account of
a logical deliberation. No amount of emphasis upon the
purely logical force of the premisses in and of itself
necessitates an action in the real world.

Aristotle clearly wishes to attach an added practical

force to the premisses. This appears to lend some weight
to J.M.Cooper's claim that it does not constitute a piece
of moral reasoning per se so much as an attempt to give an
account, if pressed, of a particular action in terms which
specify reasons.[25] There is some support for this in
Aristotle:

> When one is actually using his power
> of perception in connection with an end
> in view, or his 'imagination' or
> intellect, he does at once that which
> he desires...The last (i.e. immediate)
> cause of the motion is desire, this
> desire coming into being either through
> perception or through imagination and
> thinking.[26]

The implication seems to be that action is frequently
generated without explicit operations of reasoning. Rather,
the agent finds himself in a perceivable moral situation
where action follows naturally from a moral awareness of what
that particular situation or object requires.

We might remember, in addition, that for Aristotle the
truly good man attains a consistency of disposition such
that he will 'naturally' act in conformity with virtue each
time. This is not to say that deliberation will never be
necessary but the translation of moral awareness into action
does not appear as an essential, explicit line of reasoning
prior to acting.[27]

If in the light of this, we understand the practical
syllogism as a re-construction of thought as it is found in
action (rather than as its prior condition) a different
picture emerges. In cases of moral weakness the practical
syllogism does not occur at all in its proper sense since
one does not act (or at least one does not act well).

The final premise, the perceptual recognition of an
object or situation, is something the morally weak agent does
not have knowledge of or fails to exercise that knowledge:
these two cases are now brought much closer together. The
morally weak agent might have the final perception but does
not possess it such that if forms a premise in a practical
syllogism - which is the same as saying the way in which it
is possessed by the morally virtuous agent.

We can see the implications of this in Aristotle's account of how moral weakness figures in the psychology of the agent:

> People can repeat geometrical demonstrations
> and verses from Empedocles even when affected
> by sleep, madness and drink: and beginning
> students can reel off the words they have
> heard, but they do not yet know the subject.
> The subject must grow to be part of them and
> that takes time. We must therefore assume
> that a man who displays moral weakness repeats
> the formulae (of moral knowledge) in the
> same way as an actor speaks his lines.[28]

The force of the practical syllogism derives not simply from the logic of its premisses but rather must in some sense be related to the agent. The character of the agent proves crucial to the possibility of moral strength.[29]

The phenomenon of moral weakness appears, in this sense, as a problem in respect of the relationship between the demands of virtue and the self-conscious character of the agent. When the agent is able to express moral awareness only "as an actor speaks his lines", the demands of morals appear as abstract ones which therefore do not make themselves intrinsic to the identity of the agent. There is no real personal stake in the matter.

In the light of these considerations, we can make some more general remarks concerning Aristotle's ethics. In a sense, moral life is clearly an individual affair. For Aristotle, the cultivation of virtue confers upon the agent a certain 'independence'. But this is not to be understood in entirely individualistic terms - it is not a question of strict social autonomy. Independence is not given by virtue of a separation from the social world (the latter understood as a possible threat to identity): rather, one is independent in that one does not need others to define one's moral character.[30]

The possibility of the virtuous man as 'a law unto himself' is given by a certain sort of commitment. The capacity to cultivate virtue is grounded in the desire

> ...that things which are good in an
> unqualified sense may also be good
> for them.[31]

Aristotle points toward a notion of virtue that involves an integration of the moral personality into the 'objective' domain of ethics (discoverable in the natural association of the city). We begin to see, therefore, a social dimension to the question of the good life which in turn implies ultimately a connection to be made with politics.

The dual demand in Aristotle's account for a form of independence such that one is a law unto oneself and for a socially-grounded, practical moral consciousness (such that the law one is to oneself is not just any old law) presses us toward a more complex conception of ethical life, stemming from an organic relation between social existence and individual moral being. Equally, in this sense, we are led back toward the problem of 'dirty hands'.

The virtuous man is 'at home in the world': although this does not mean that living in the world becomes automatically unproblematic for the finite moral agent. However, we can recall that only the virtuous agent is able to bear the vicissitudes of fortune gracefully. The encounter with moral multiplicity appears as one of the keys to framing the character of the virtuous agent - and the field of multiplicity is given by the social world in which characters develop and find their expression. Before we can make more of this, the connection with politics needs to be made more explicit.

Already in the Ethics this connection is drawn through an analysis of justice. Considered in its fullest sense, justice becomes one mode of encountering virtue:

> (justice and virtue) are the same
> thing but what they are (in terms of
> their definition) is not the same;
> in so far as it is exhibited in
> relation to others it is justice but
> in so far as it is a characteristic
> of this kind it is virtue.[32]

Universal justice, then is a virtue understood from a 'social' point of view. But we also find Aristotle talking of justice in a 'partial' sense. To clarify this distinction, he introduces the two notions of law and fairness. But the relation he posits between them is somewhat surprising.

We might expect 'fairness' to be the more general term,
having a wider application than does legality - but
Aristotle implies precisely the reverse:

> ...unfair and unlawful are not
> identical but distinct and related
> to one another as the part is
> related to the whole; for everything
> unfair is unlawful but not everything
> unlawful is unfair.[33]

Thus, 'partial' justice, which represents a subset of the
range of applications demanded by universal justice, is
defined in terms of considerations of fairness; and it lies
inside the limits of law (which, as we have noted, constitutes
the social instantiation of the whole of virtue).

This has important implications when we note that for
Aristotle, the ruler is

> ...the guardian of what is just and
> as such he is also the guardian of
> equality and fairness.[34]

The political ruler appears to be in a certain way responsible
for the public moment of virtue in general. The public world,
then, comes to bear closely upon the lives of citizens - and
this appears as a consequence of a commitment to virtue of
the sort Aristotle affirms as the foundation of the good life.

The state makes itself indispensible to the possibility
of the good life in society.[35] Although this is not to forget
that the state (or the public realm of the 'city') has a
generalised character. The voice of public virtue is law and
so there is still a distinction to be borne in mind between
the particular life of the individual as a moral being and the
life of the state as an ethical body.

There is nevertheless an intimate relation between the
two: at the end of the Ethics, Aristotle suggests that

> ...a man who wants to make others
> better by devoting care to them -
> regardless of whether they are many
> or few - should try to learn
> something about legislation.[36]

The idea of the political community as a realm which
facilitates the flourishing of the individual cannot be
taken in a modern sense. The state does not exist to
facilitate the pursuit of purely individualised interests.[37]

In what sense, then, is political life to be understood? As we have seen, virtue appears in a social context; but more than this, Aristotle wants to say that the good life, human flourishing, must be defined in terms which have a political aspect. To live a good life is to realise a fully human existence - to fulfil man's natural function.[38] But given that man is by nature political, part of this function is precisely to live in a political community - to be a citizen. This appears to bring Aristotle closer to what Strauss refers to as a 'patriotic' perspective upon political life.[39] The development of the moral individual finds its guarantee in politics as the focus for self-identification.

> Anyone who by his nature and not
> simply by ill-luck has no state is
> either too bad or too good, either
> subhuman or superhuman.[40]

And we must remember here that the instantiation of virtue in the community is given by the demands of public law.[41]

Before we assume, however, that Aristotle's account invokes political life as the exhaustive criterion and guarantee of individual virtue, we must note that he wishes to retain a firm logical distinction between moral virtue and citizenship. Being a good citizen does not necessarily entail being a good man.[42] In the light of this, a judgment upon the character of the political realm must remain available.

We can refer here to the analysis in the Politics of the relation between civic virtue and moral virtue. The two are clearly distinct in a formal sense: the demands they make upon the individual are different. Civic virtue, the virtue which is the hallmark of citizenship, is directed toward the constitutional association. In this sense, the substantive character of civic virtue will depend upon the specific form of a particular constitution. Moral virtue on the other hand is not dependent in this substantive way. But this is a formal distinction and whether the two kinds of virtue, which must always co-exist, can actually coalesce, is a contingent matter.

There remains, however, a single case where civic virtue and virtue in general must be identical; and this is the case of the ruler:

> The virtue of the good ruler is the
> same as moral virtue.[43]

Why should Aristotle insist upon this? He draws a further
distinction which is relevant here: we must distinguish
between political rule and the rule, for example, of the
master over the slave. In the latter case, the master, in
order to do his job _as_ a master, needs no knowledge of the
slave in terms of the character of his tasks and his
conceptions of the world. In the case of political rule,
the requirements are very different. The ruler learns to
develop a vision stretching beyond his own immediate position
- unless he understands what is involved in being a subject
he cannot rule effectively. The position of the ruler
involves the most 'generalised' form of activity and thus,
the virtue he embodies _as_ a ruler must be of the most
comprehensive form.

This does not apply, at least as a necessary condition,
to the citizen-subject: the minimum level of _his_ virtue is
determined by his social position.[44] And in this sense, for
Aristotle, a good state with a good ruler can get by, at
least for a time, with a populace that displays civic virtue
(i.e. the capacity to live by the constitution) and not full
moral virtue.[45] But this is far from the best we can hope
for; it is by no means ideal. The best form of political
life is where many can share in the demands of rule; where
citizenship can demand a great deal. Aristotle reaches a
teleological definition of the citizen as one who

> ...has a share both in the administration
> of justice and in the holding of office.[46]

In this sense, the good citizen should be capable both of
ruling and of being ruled, of seeing public matters from
both points of view. Through this definition of citizenship,
Aristotle points toward a conception of civic virtue, in its
fullest sense, as tending toward identity with virtue as a
whole.

> the excellence of the full citizen
> who shares in the government is the
> same as that of the good man.[47]

The fully 'good man' exercises all his human faculties to
the full - and in this sense, unless one manifests full
civic virtue, he cannot be fully good.

This seems to carry with it the implication that those who do not acquaint themselves with the practice of rule cannot be morally good. But the formal distinction we saw Aristotle making between civic virtue and moral virtue renders this strong claim questionable: moral virtue cannot depend wholly upon one's ability to exercise full civic virtue.

There may however be a slightly weaker version of this claim implicit in Aristotle's account. And we can approach this through a contrast with modern understandings of the issue. The modern distinction between public and private tends to resolve itself into the life of the political state as against the private moral beliefs or the personal moral will of the individual. Moral beliefs, then, become entirely independent of, and even in opposition to, the claims of citizenship which bear upon the individual 'from a distance'. In Aristotle, the relationship is more complex. Moral virtue, as we have seen, is something which requires cultivation and needs to be expressed in practice between individuals who are acting in a common sphere in the context of mutual recognition. Part of the point of politics is to establish and sustain a common world of this sort. This is not to say that the fields of application of morality and politics co-incide precisely; but the distinction may be more one of degree than we might suppose from a modern perspective.

The central implication here is that although moral virtue and civic virtue are distinct, they both have a necessary bearing upon the individual qua individual. And in this sense, the moral duality they represent is one that cannot be avoided. Since citizenship is a natural tendency of human beings, the manner in which it bears upon citizens, and the character of its relation with human capacities in general (including moral virtue) is of some significance. Where citizenship requires only a low level of commitment - enough to guarantee consistent obedience to the constitution - it appears that one's life as a citizen and one's life as a being of virtue, as an immanent moral being, can never be properly integrated.[48]

A healthy state, it seems, tends to close this gap – to render citizenship a pursuit which can be fully integrated into the moral character of the agent. And this appears to ground the available mode of judgment upon the city. Ultimately, the purpose of public life is to factilitate the all-round flourishing of human capacities. And in this sense, the more citizenship makes itself felt in the immanent realm of individual commitments and conceptions, the better. Where, on the other hand, the substance of citizenship takes on a more abstract form (mere 'right' opinion') the possibility of bringing the moral dispositions of citizens into a relationship with the public realm are reduced.

There are two dimensions to Aristotle's perspective upon the life of the city which make this consideration an important one. First, although law is the central framework for public good, it is not enough that it is simply obeyed; it requires for its functioning, a sense of commitment. In this sense, laws should impinge upon the moral being of citizens – laws should set "high moral standards"[49]. The life of the city, then, seems to rely for its health upon the moral commitment of its members:

> ...there can be no doing right for
> a state any more than there can be
> good for an individual in the absence
> of goodness and wisdom.[50]

And in relation to this, a second confirmation appears: the conduct of public life is enhanced according to the level of participation. The more free citizens there are to participate in the deliberative political process, the more likely they are to arrive at wise and just policy.[51]

Thus, the health of the state seems in some measure to rely upon the moral contribution to be made by citizens. And for this contribution to be genuine on the part of the individual one's moral being and one's sense of civic duty must converge upon the character of the individual. Politics serves to unite the individual with the common ground of judgment and the corresponding virtue of the citizen makes itself felt in the political culture of the city. The healthy state reveals its own dialectic of preservation.[52]

Referring back to Aristotle's account of weakness of
will, where moral demands are expressed only 'as an actor
speaks his lines', they remain external to us as rules or
commands. In this way, the locus for moral unity in the
context of a multiplicity of goods is lost. The ethical
process is acted out beyond the grasp of the character of
the agent. Moral weakness, whether temporary or persistent
appears as a particular form of this general moral alienation.

We are now in a position to return to the central
question of 'dirty hands'. An assessment of the strengths
and weaknesses of Aristotle's general perspective upon politics
with reference to political morality may be related to the
general distinctions between the Aristotelian approach and
more modern thinking.

Aristotle has little to say concerning the specific
problem of 'dirty hands'. His account of public life, based
upon what he takes to be the natural condition of life in a
political community, tends toward the assertion of a
'harmonization' between political activity and the general
moral being of citizens. In this sense, 'dirty hands'
problems tend not to be a feature of politics as Aristotle
understands it. We might expect, however, that this will
depend to some extent upon the health of the state - the
extent to which the constitution is stable and well-
recognised. And indeed, when he gives recommendations as
to the preservation of the constitution, Aristotle finds it
necessary to give more attention to unstable political forms,
culminating in the problem of maintaining tyrannies which is
inherently difficult and is ultimately an "utterly depraved"
enterprise.[53]

Are we to assume, then, that in healthy states there is
no problem at all? Aristotle's faith in the idea of a stable
and comprehensive system of law certainly aims at minimizing
such problems; however, legislation and legal judgment is
not the whole of politics. Legal enactments are necessarily
general in scope, but Aristotle notes that actions are
concerned with particulars and "there are some things about
which it is not possible to speak correctly in universal

terms".[54] In this sense, a burden may be placed upon political agents which is more than just one of enactment - and this is the source, for Aristotle, of the virtue of 'equity' which can be understood as the ability to attend to the particular case. It is a capacity which offsets the tendency to be "a stickler for justice in a bad sense".[55] In this way, there may be some conflict between particular enactments of justice and its expression as universal virtue. Although it remains the case that the ultimate reference here is a legalistic one: equity articulates "what the lawgiver would have said had he been present".[56] There remains, for Aristotle, an underlying harmony given by universal justice. And this is borne out in the measures he suggests for the general maintenance of the city, measures which are generally constitutional in form. Breaches of the law are ruled out: even the most insignificant breach is to be guarded against due to the precedent it sets.[57] And further,

> ...we must not trust those arguments
> of sophistry that are designed to delude
> the multitude.."[58]

Measures often associated with the problematic necessities of rule are dismissed by Aristotle.

This seems to be related to certain general features of Aristotle's thought. The polis, we remember, is natural; and the tendency toward a harmonization of multiplicities in relation to the virtue of the individual is equally understood as a natural one. In this sense, certain of the difficulties heralded by modern thought and practice do not figure. It is significant that Machiavelli, whose thought was informed to a large extent by the demise of classical political forms, raised problems of political morality in a particularly urgent form. The possibility that the natural relationships specified by the classical ideal may be undermined, and consequently that the idea of a persisting public arena may require positive foundation and maintenance, raises a new set of difficulties. And central here is the suggestion that the requirements of moral virtue and the commitments attaching to politics cannot readily be harmonized.

The internal connection Aristotle affirms between the public association and the moral lives of citizens seems to

be undermined by modernity. In this way the instantiation of the meaningful association becomes an independent task with independent demands upon those who undertake it. In the light of this, are we to assume that Aristotle's approach is irrelevant to political agency in the modern context? A modern perspective that would rest content with the idea of public life as a construct subsequent to the real lives of individuals (and their informing interests) may well come to this conclusion. But in relation to a discussion of the problem of political morality, we have found reason to be wary of much of the theoretical ballast which supports these kinds of perspectives

As we have noted, Aristotle's perspective challenges assumptions concerning the distinction between public and private understood as a foundation for a categorical split between politics as 'realism' and morality as a realm of 'unworldly' principle (to which access is possible only for the private individual). In this sense, a constructive feature of the Aristotelian approach rests upon the development of a conception of virtue.

This point is echoed by Hannah Arendt: although Arendt presents a picture of the polis which is not strictly Aristotelian.[59] Her account is of interest here in so far as she draws our attention to certain qualitative features of the classical public realm which the modern world has lost.[60] The attenuation of modern politics (which Arendt associates with the rise of the 'social' - the introduction of the realm of necessity into public affairs, with its attendant emphasis upon instrumentality) is important in that it equally heralds an attenuation of the private sphere. The latter is reduced merely to a realm of 'intimacy' (profoundly expressed in the writings of Rousseau).[61] As a result, questions of moral virtue are replaced by 'unworldly' references which may ultimately be hostile to politics.[62] On this basis, clearly, problems such as those of 'dirty hands' become intolerable from the point of view of moral consistency.

However, we may still need to raise further questions

which press upon the idea of the polis through the fact of modernity. The rise of the 'social' appears to match the general re-ordering of socio-economic relations which has characterised the movement away from the classical-aristocratic form toward the modern 'democratisation' of the 'social' sphere.[63]

In this respect, we might note that Arendt's view of necessity as belonging properly to the private, non-political (or pre-political) sphere generates problems with respect to content from a modern perspective. Elster notes that the Arendtian identification of economics as a distinct condition of politics renders the latter non-substantive; and in this sense, it is difficult to see how politics can figure in people's lives as a compelling field of engagement.[64] However, accepting Elster's reservation here does not entail the rejection of politics as a realm of participation which can facilitate the application of virtues and which thereby retains a qualitative status.[65]

We are brought back, then, to the problem of affirming the possibility of positive human virtue in the context of modern tendencies toward disintegration. As we have seen, the problems generated by the threat of social disintegration, sharply expressed by Machiavelli, have been met by the attempt to specify a form of public good which resolves the difficulty in a contractual manner: politics takes its place as a field of instrumental conflict-resolution. This has been reflected in characterisations of the relationship between politics and morality which frame the problem in terms of a dilemma which requires to be resolved (one way or the other) in the practical context. Politics gains its power from its instrumentality. As Arendt notes, where public action takes on a fully instrumental guise, it may often appear as a poor substitute for mute violence.[66]

In the modern context, however, the instantiation of a positive conception of politics appears increasingly in the guise of an imposition. And in this manner, again, the possibility of moral sensibility with respect to politics

begins to fade. In the light of this, if the natural
political order can no longer be relied upon, the possibility
of finding a place for politics in the ambit of constructive
human practice must depend upon finding some mode of
characterisation which falls between this naturalism and a
vision of politics as an instrumental construct at odds
with genuine human powers.

What are the conditions under which such a characteris-
ation becomes meaningful? Clearly, this will depend heavily
upon self-conceptions which include the image of human
character as the means of the positive articulation of virtue.
In so far as it is a distinctively human pursuit, politics
needs to be understood in the context of these conceptions.
Taking a lead from Aristotle, we can see here the centrality
of the idea of politics as a common object, as the focus for
the expression of a common interest which is not simply a
device subsequent to real (individual) interest, but a
reference to what is common between us as substantive
individuals. But when we take the idea of social conflict
and disintegration seriously as an historically manifest
threat to a civic life, now unprotected by the shelter of
natural teleology, this idea takes on a newly burdensome
appearance. The conditions under which a public life can be
sustained become more demanding.[67]

We have seen that the danger posed to the idea of a
constructive public life or political culture rests primarily
with the loss of a genuine connection or relationship between
individuals as substantive beings and political agency. The
nature of this polarisation is not only or primarily a matter
of political power. Crucial to understanding its implications
is the manner in which this relationship is expressed in
moral terms. In this respect, the central problem derives
from the tendency of the life of the individual to become
purely private and the corresponding detachment of the
public realm. As Aristotle recognised, the possibility of
preserving both resides in the recognition of a genuine
encounter between ethical demands and the moral self-
recognition of individuals. In the absence of this, agency
gains its meaning only from abstractions and the individual

as a source of commitment drops out.

But in the context where natural relations of
citizenship are not necessarily available, these relationships
need positive sustenance. As we have seen, this process
requires that political life makes itself felt in the lives
of individuals; and in this sense, modes of participatory
activity become crucial. Structures of interaction,
communication and agency which provide a means by which
politics becomes a field of real activity for individuals
replaces the idea of a natural hierarchy as the manner in
which common concerns may become objects for the application
of individual resources. It is under these conditions that
we can retain an image of politics as a characteristic human
activity.

Again, there are implications for problems of 'dirty
hands' here. If we understand politics, in one form or
another, as a persistent feature of a human society, then
'dirty hands' problems of a more or less severe character
remain an issue.[68] The emphasis upon politics as a field of
common interest, inviting the application of individual
resources may be understood in turn to imply the possibility
of individual self-development and cultivation (facilitated
by their public articulation) - but how does this issue out
with respect to moral conflict?

We have seen that the framing of fields of moral
and political concern in terms which generate channels for
the cultivation and expression of virtues cuts across a
sharp modern distinction between public and private. In
Aristotle, we encounter a distinction between individual moral
life and civic virtue which is united within the context of
the substantive character of individuals and appears rather
as a multiplicity indexed against more particular or more
general expressions of virtue. It is in this sense that
conflicting demands may be brought into a real relationship
with one another in the form of what Weil describes as

>   ...a tension on the part of the soul's
>   faculties which renders possible the
>   degree of concentration required for
>   composition on a multiple plane.[69]

This process is significant even where the assumption of
natural harmony is unavailable. The possibility of finding
a moral orientation which can survive the encounter with
multiplicity suggests equally the possibility of coping with
its demands.

We can recall here that Aristotle regards the ruler as
one who requires a fully developed virtue. The generality
of the plane of activity upon which he operates suggests the
need for a moral character of the widest scope. It is in this
sense that we can understand Aristotle's claim that "ruling
will show the man".[70] (A claim we found to be central to an
understanding of the fate of Sophocles' Creon.[71]) As a
mode of public engagement, politics may make demands which
prompt the development of qualities of character including
moral ones. And it is in this context that individuals may
prove capable of retaining a moral sensibility in the face
of politics.

But this may not be a point restricted to the ruler.[72]
Where social disintegration becomes a possibility, we may
face the danger that politics as a whole may lose this
distinctive role and in this sense, the kinds of conceptions
and judgments which come to inform public conduct may
equally lose their distinctiveness. The possibility of
community is correspondingly diminished. This serves to re-
affirm the significance of moral engagement through
participation as a mode of preserving these informing
conceptions. The emphasis here must be upon forms of
mediation which require activity rather than simply modes of
structural recognition.

We can take this issue further by examining an added
dimension given by the question of temporality. Again, this
is a theme to which Machiavelli is deeply sensitive in the
light of the collapse of ancient political cultures.[73] As
Gunnell notes, political thought has generally adopted a
'spatial' form at the expense of temporal dynamics. In this
sense, it appears as a shadow of the divine or cosmic
determination of human affairs. The attempt to articulate
static forms that embody the human good specifies a

a relationship between human finitude and the permanent essence of the good as an 'external' one referring to something transcendent of the human realm.[74] Machiavelli's rejection of permanent structures of the good (which to some extent is prefigured in Aristotle[75]) brings the full force of temporality to bear upon civic culture: our fintiude renders the object of permanence consistently elusive. Opinions, relationships and structures can all change (and indeed they must); and in the light of this deeply disturbing fact, Machiavelli reaches for a new image of the city: One which, as Orr notes, is temporally derived.

> A constitution is a temporal device
> - in itself an event - made to regulate
> the sequences of legal and political
> events. Its value is its permanency,
> and in order to last it has to take
> account both of forseeable and
> unforseeable possibilities.[76]

This perspective equally appears as part and parcel of Machiavelli's suspicion of religion in relation to politics. Christianity is intrinsically non-temporal, urging us toward occupancy of a realm beyond temporality, and hence beyond a commitment to the fate of humanity.

This criticism is restated by Arendt in a manner which relates it to the moral difficulties presented to the city by 'worldlessness'.[77] Arendt's concern is to identify the senses in which it is in the nature of a genuine public realm to promote temporal continuity. It is by virtue of its very 'publicness' that this is made possible. It is only when activity becomes the object of the public gaze that it becomes the object of enduring memory. In the light of this, it becomes clear that only where we can discover a public culture which is a field for the application of substantive qualities and virtues can the tradition of virtue be maintained.[78]

In this sense, the task of maintaining virtue in a community appears as a permanent one; and the task of maintaining a public culture which is capable not only of specifying structures of activity but of making, in the course of this, demands upon citizens as moral beings, becomes essential. The danger posed by temporality lies in the possibility that the patterns of relationships and

meanings embodied in a community might fall from view, becoming independent of the energies and responsibilities of those who animate them. The possibility that time may ossify these structures indicates the manner in which the field of social and political agency may be cut adrift from the substantive being of individuals such that a 'moral alienation' comes to characterise the community. In this sense, structures of participation and moral identification may become vital to the task of maintaining the idea of a community which is for its members and is correspondingly an object of their responsibility.

Clearly, if we are searching for some positive blueprint for political life, these remarks will be inadequate. However, part of the point here is precisely to avoid these sorts of substantive "recipes" by which a public realm could be constructed. Rather, the aim has been to identify certain collective moral resources which demand recognition in the light of a search for a morally relevant mode of political agency. This demand for recognition equally implicates the notion of a community understood as an association which bears the imprint of those who act within it.

Similarly, the point is not to search for a perspective which might abolish ambiguity or moral multiplicity.[79] Rather, these informing conception serve to specify a mode of approaching multiplicity which renders moral sensibility possible. It is only where a community can sustain these conceptions that such possibilities can properly be realised.[80] In this sense, moral and political judgments require a self-conscious collective context. We have seen that the prior assumption of universality with respect to the judgments of individuals is suggestive of moral abstraction and, as a result, of the pretence to 'transcendence' of 'worldly'life. However, to re-cast the image of moral (and political) judgment as an immanent capacity is equally to recognise the need for its location in a collective context. In the light of this, it becomes a task of a community to replace the abstract, theoretical ascent from individual to universal perspectives with concrete modes of mediating between life as an individual and life as an associated being.

Returning briefly to Aristotle, we can note the sense in which practical wisdom, the hallmark of virtue, is something which can be developed only in practice; it is through being presented with the tasks and responsibilities of living in a community that moral vision is possible. Correspondingly, it is only in this way that the capacity of being able to see things from 'both points of view' can be developed. Practical responsibility then, in the context of a community replaces an abstract moral perspective.[81] In this sense, politics, for Aristotle, is undertaken by beings who are necessarily 'located' and who develop moral capability through immanent moral connections with their social world. The necessary distinctions entailed by the imperatives attaching to position, role and 'perspective' cannot be overcome simply by a priori universalism.

These considerations serve to re-emphasise the inadequacy of theoretically grounded blueprints. When we recognise the demand for a place to be afforded to questions of moral character and finitude, such blueprints or foundational theories manifest a tendency toward the 'closure' of these constructive modes of recognition. The impulse to allow theory a mastery with respect to practice appears, therefore, as deeply problematic.

But more needs to be said here. Theoretical pictures undoubtedly form part and parcel of human practice; and therefore we need to press further the question of the _place_ of such pictures and the role they play. In this connection, the above remarks may appear ultimately to effect the replacement of one theoretical picture with abother.

However, the sorts of theoretical pictures we might formulate of human practice, and which will bear more or less closely upon that practice, may vary more profoundly than the above objection would imply. Such pictures will entail not only particular practical self-conceptions but also related implications concerning the place of such pictures themselves and the mode of their derivation.[82] These implications will inevitable bear upon a conception of the relationship between theory and practice and upon the attendant self-conceptions which are the hallmark of a more general account.

Our discussion has focussed upon two alternative
pictures of moral life which appear to vary in this profound
way. We have encountered a view of the moral individual
which specifies a prominent role for ethical theory. On
this view, moral agency appears in the form of action in
accordance with prior, discernible principles available to
the individual as a universal rational being. In contrast
with this picture, and in the light of the failings it
appeared to embody, we have outlined a picture which, as a
theoretical picture, has a different sort of claim upon us.
This picture retains an emphasis upon the moral character
of agents and the positive manifestation of moral virtues.
The implications of this refer to the moral individual as
a practical possessor of moral characteristics in the context
of collective structures of meaning and agency.

This account invokes an altered picture of the moral
self which equally alters the role of theory itself. It is
a picture which constantly brings us back to social practice
as its own foundation. In this sense, theory ceases to
specify practice in itself. Rather it re-appears as a mode
of identifying and articulating the moral resources of
individuals in practice. The crux of this departure may be
discovered in the differing practical self-conceptions that
result. The stress here is upon a persistent conscious
relationship between moral agency and identity. We have
seen that 'theorized' self conceptions tend to sever this
relationship - and the encounter with moral multiplicity
appears as an important test of its strength[83]- and in the
light of this, the introduction of a practical dimension
appears crucial in the attempt to retain moral identity.

A further conclusion follows here. The effect of this
kind of reformulation of ethics is not simply to arrive at
a different account, but to render moral agency in the world
a more deeply self-conscious form of activity. To the
extent that one emphasises the possibility of retaining a
substantive sense of moral identity, one is uniquely
'implicated' in one's moral judgments, and in this sense,
the problem of 'dirty hands' becomes a burden falling upon

the substantive agent which cannot be shed by reference to principle.

In the light of this consideration, we can see that moral agency takes on a newly 'expressive' character. To judge is to implicate oneself as a substantial being - and equally as an historically and socially 'located' being. This indicates the extent to which such a picture of the moral agent is at variance with a strict moral individualism. To the extent, equally, that political judgment and action can cohere within this picture, it enters on to the immanent moral agenda; and questions of collective virtue prove relevant. However, we now need to consider two possible objections.

First, even if we insist upon an image of moral practice as in this way 'expressive' attaching this image to politics is less convincing. Politics, after all, requires attention to instrumental considerations in a way that other forms of moral agency do not. To treat politics as a mode of 'expression' may therefore represent a reckless pursuit of moral self-development in a realm where considerations transcendent of moral 'selfhood' are paramount. However, as we have already suggested, these two aspects are not necessarily mutually exclusive (just as to act in a morally problematic way is not necessarily to act according to imperatives which are non-moral). We can recall here Aristotle's account of practical wisdom. The deliberation involved in the exercise of practical reason is always toward some end. However, this does not serve to align it with simple 'cleverness' - moral character is crucial in the process of deliberation and action in so far as it is through the dispositions of the agent that the relationship between means and ends is rendered an internal one and is therefore properly virtuous (one cannot, we remember, be good by mere imitation).[84]

We might note, in addition, that the above objection is founded upon a sharp distinction between the character of moral agency and that of political agency; it is a distinction

which, on inspection, is hardly compelling. The kinds of
considerations which bear upon political judgment and which
are the basis of this distinction cannot be assumed always
to be absent from moral life in general - to this extent,
instrumentality, ambiguity and ultimately, 'dirty hands'
problems are not confined to politics. It may be the case
that politics ushers in these problems in a prevalent and
sharpened form, but the insistence upon an absolute
distinction here implies an understanding of morality (one
which automatically distinguishes it from 'worldly' life)
that we have found to be inadequate.

A second objection here might centre upon the problem
of whether any role or significance at all remains to be
afforded to political thought. We have found reason to
object to the domination of practice by theory, but are we
not consenting to the reverse relationship - one which may
be no less problematic in its claims and no less ominous in
its practical articulation.

The relationship between the exercise of virtue and
common practical structures suggests that moral specification
is dependent upon what Dallmayer describes as a form of
"human accomplishment".[85] This places upon us a demand for
the re-consideration of the significance of theory in general.
The notion of human virtue locates moral judgment within the
practical, collective form of social life; and, as a result,
coming to a reflective understanding of our modes of
judgment requires that we proceed from a position internal
to that practice itself. In this sense, the considerations
of 'hermeneutics' appear significant.[86]

The general problem of the relationship between general
theoretical statements and particulars is susceptible to
contrasting formulations As Habermas notes, from the point
of view of formalized theoretical pictures, the problem may
appear to be given by the lack of conformity displayed by the
latter in the face of the demands of the former. In
linguistic terms, the formalized language of theory contains
an implied system of "metalinguistic rules of constitution"
by reference to which "we can re-construct every statement

that is possible in such a language".[87] A 'hermeneutic'
approach tends to reverse the priorities here: although it
appears that such a 'reversal' equally serves to re-cast the
problem.

This is so in part because where the 'gap' between the
particulars of individual life experience and a character-
isable 'objective' world in which that identity is itself
located and objectified is understood as a distinction between
contingent appearance and the theoretically specifiable
essence of reality, it becomes a problem to be resolved. The
risk of the tendency toward such a 'closure' appears as a
form of 'reification'. The implicit assumption is that
human practice may be subject to immediate interpretation
independently of the concrete experience given by that
practice.[88] We have charted some of the implications attendant
upon the adoption of this approach in the form of normative
self-conceptions.

In the light of these implications, a renewed emphasis
upon the experiential grounding of objective understandings
and interpretations constitutes more than a straightforward
shift of emphasis. An alternative conception of the
significance of the 'gap' involved in the interpretation of
experience emerges, especially in the light of the fact that
real individuals are the interpreters. Where objective
accounts are understood to be derived from practice and to
be tasks _for_ the practical agent (and which can   therefore
enter into practical self-conceptions), the 'gap' involved
here reveals itself to be internal to the field of human
practice in general.[89] Reflection upon human practice becomes
equally a mode of self-reflection. The demand for objectivity
in understanding clearly still remains. And this is
indicative of the sense in which the 'objectivity' of social
practice itself is relevant - not simply through its 'essence'
but through its instantiation in a constituting community.[90]

In the light of this, the limits of theory are
themselves inadequately characterised in a manner which
renders them 'externally' definable. Rather, they appear
only as a self-conscious dimension to theory itself when it

is compelled to incorporate questions of character and of immanent meaning.[91] The role of the theorist has traditionally been conceived of in terms of the attempt to transcend real discourse and activity toward a foundational structure, and hence toward a determining essence. The rejection of this project entails more than simply a scepticism concerning the findings of theoretical reflection - rather, it implies a re-cast conception of theory, its role and its significance.

In a similar way, with respect to the rejection of foundational theories of knowledge, Richard Rorty suggests that reflection must contain with itself

> "...an expression of hope that the cultural
> space left by the demise of epistemology
> will not be filled" [92]

Following Gadamer, Rorty suggests a mode of theoretical enquiry which takes as its object the conditions of and relationships between, discourses understood as strands in a possible conversation. Agreement, then, becomes a 'hope' rather than a prior necessity.[93] This is not to say that objectivity is thereby rendered obsolete. Norms of justification may remain - the point, however, is that they need to be understood as practically generated and not, therefore, as routes of access to absolute foundations.

We have observed the manner in which problems are generated where ethical theory adopts a positivity which transcends character and moves toward a demand for exhaustive, rational resolutions. Equally, political theory may adapt to this movement. Particular theories of ethics clearly bear upon the sorts of claims which are taken to inform politics. And to the extent that political agency directs itself to substantive, predefined ends, problems associated with the imposition of morally-grounded 'blueprints' make themselves felt.[94] Political theory, therefore, equally appears in the context of this discussion as a constructively self-limiting pursuit.

The idea of theory as dependent upon practical, expressive activity reveals an intrinsic recognition of 'finitude'. And with this in mind, we can relate these considerations back to the specific question of political

morality and the problem of 'dirty hands'. We have noted
that beliefs about the role of theory are closely connected
with the sorts of self-conceptions which find embodiment in
practice.

The explicit articulation of moral self-conceptions
will involve a reference to the genesis and conditions of
such conceptions themselves. And in this context, the
temptation toward foundational explications may be strong.
At its most basic level, the problem generated by this
temptation is the possibility of formulating self-
understandings which cut themselves loose from their
practical conditions and which can therefore entail an
opposition to practice. We come to understand ourselves,
then, in isolation from the world and as beings capable of
encapsulating the sorts of exhaustive certainties theoretical
reason seems to promise. As we have seen, the brand of
'certainty' which may result has deeply disturbing
consequences for beings who are nevertheless 'worldly' and may
face the sorts of imperatives and difficulties 'worldly' life
tends to generate.[95]

In a similar vein, Jacobson notes that "He who does not
know everything cannot kill everything".[96] But this cannot,
of course, be a strict entailment. The crucial qualification
is whether one thinks on can know everything. The experience
of politics in the modern context has testified to the extent
of the power theory can accrue when it comes to dominate
practice.

The aim of this chapter has been to draw out the
implications of this with respect to the sorts of traditions
we might draw upon in order to render the problem of political
morality one which can be contemplated without the
temptation to abolish it. What we can learn from these
traditions prompts a re-consideration of the way we think
about politics. Such a re-consideration must centre upon
what it means for politics to be a characteristic human
activity. On this basis, we are able to identify what
crucial self-conceptions and possibilities politics is

capable of embodying from the perspective of the problems of modernity. An emphasis upon the practical articulation of these conceptions and possibilities is crucial to the idea of political action which does not fall into terror.

Notes

1.   This has partly been established negatively, by contrast
with individualising moral theories. We have also seen
that certain problematic responses in a political
context resolve themselves into a moral approach which
separates the agent from his community.
At one level, of course, it might be said that any
moral perspective will link the agent to the community
since such perspectives, even if they are individualistic
in character, derive from some communal agreement.
However, the point remains that differences emerge with
respect to how the relationship between the agent and
his community figures as a practical self-conception
(figures, that is, in the idea of what it is to act as
a moral being). This sort of difference underlies the
distinctions Marx draws between bourgeois and proletarian
outlooks.

2.   S.Weil (1978) p.168

3.   ibid

4.   Precisely what Burke was actually defending would be a
relevant concern here. That his efforts are directed
as much toward relations of economic and social power
as to moral and political relations is at least arguable.
Further, the question remains as to the _standing_ of such
a defence once it is necessary that it should be
properly articulated. Under these circumstances, a
defence may become more _active_ than it at first appears.

5.   A.J.Polan (1984) p.139

6.   There is some evidence for Polan's view when we look at
Lenin: _State and Revolution_ supplies a foundation for
temporary violence:

> "...the need for violence against people
> in general, the need for subjection of one
> man to another, will vanish since people
> will become accustomed to observing the
> elementary conditions of social life
> without force... " V.I.Lenin (1968) p.320

The project becomes one of imposing a structure within
which being a good citizen develops as a requirement and
eventually a habit.

7.   S.Weil (1978) p.82

8. This is echoed in Orwell's <u>Nineteen Eighty-four</u> . As Shklar points out, O'Brien tells Winston, during his interrogation, that it is not 'solipsism' to say that <u>he</u> decides what is true and false, for he does not act as an individual. See J.Shklar (1985)

9. The difference here for the individual is articulated by Weil as one between

> "blindly submitting to the spur with which
> necessity pricks him on from outside, or
> else adapting himself to the inner representation
> of it that he forms in his own mind"
> - S.Weil (1978) p.86

The idea of an 'inner necessity' becomes crucial in this context, and it is partly this idea which will be examined in this chapter.

10. Aristotle (1962) p.25; 1100b

11. ibid p.22; 1099b

12. ibid p.34; 1103b

13. ibid p.35; 1104a

14. Aristotle (1976) pp.100-110; 1106-1109b

15. ibid p.100; 1106a

16. Barnes notes that the doctrine of the mean is a non-substantive one. Rather, it appears as purely analytic specifying claims such as "do not do too much" etc. In this sense, for Barnes, it is entirely unhelpful. However, it does tell us a good deal about Aristotle's conception of ethics and the fact that it must always relate back to the character and practice of agents. In this sense, abstract moral advice is not an appropriate task for ethical theory. In addition, the sense we get of an appropriate 'balance' between different responses and perspectives in the idea of a mean proves significant. Such a balance must require attention to the particular demands of a situation and one's responsibilities in relation to it. In the case of conflicts of obligation, for example, virtue consists in recognising "what is appropriate and fitting to each" - Aristotle (1962) p.249; 1165a - See also J.Barnes (1979)

17. Aristotle (1962) p.39; 1105b

18. ibid p.31; 1102b

19. ibid p.153; 1140b

20. As we shall see, this issues out in differences with respect to questions of political morality.

21. cf. R.Robinson (1979)

22. Aristotle (1962) p.181; 1146b

23. ibid p.185; 1147b
    To this extent, Socrates is correct, on Aristotle's
    terms, to think that knowledge cannot be overcome by
    the immediate effect of passion. It is rather a form
    of sensory knowledge (the minor premise) that is negated.

24. ibid

25. J.M.Cooper (1975) p.51

26. Aristotle De Motu Animalium 701a 25-26 in J.M.Cooper
    (1975) p.52

27. cf. D.J.Allen (1973)
    Aristotle's account of moral reasoning has often been
    interpreted in a 'Humean' manner; an interpretation
    which misses much of the significance of the
    Aristotelian approach.

28. Aristotle (1962) p.182-3; 1147a

29. Cleverness, skill in reasoning, is no defence against
    moral weakness since the ability to draw correct
    conclusions does not carry in itself the guarantee of
    right action given by the practical syllogism. It is
    in the context of a particular kind of character that
    the relationship between a theoretical obligation and
    action is secured. Only when the subject has become
    'part' of him can the agent be said to possess the
    foundation of this security; when moral obligations are
    internalised as intrinsic to the character of the agent.
    The individual of good character identifies the meaning
    and direction of his own life with that of the demands
    of virtue. The living of a good life becomes desirable
    in the same way that the pursuit of the good for oneself
    is desirable. In this sense, the distinction between
    cleverness and practical wisdom is manifest in the fact
    that the latter is internally related to the good: "A
    man cannot have practical reason unless he is good" -
    Aristotle (1976) p.223; 1144a
    Similarly, instrumental reason can be exercised well or
    badly; practical reason, however, is exercised well if
    it is exercised at all.

30. This, for Aristotle, is precisely the sort of dependence

which springs from considering oneself to be outside
or above the social domain. The fate of Shakespeare's
Coriolanus testifies to the problems deriving from such
a separation. For a sustained comparison between
Coriolanus and the Aristotelian notion of moral
character see J.Alvis (1978)

31. Aristotle (1962) p.113; 1129b
32. ibid p.115; 1130a
33. ibid p.116; 1130b
34. ibid p.130; 1134b
35. It is only when it realises itself publicly as justice
    that virtue is complete. ibid p.114; 1129b
36. ibid p.299; 1180b
37. It is certainly true, for Aristotle, that political life
    provides an arena where individual self-realization is
    possible and this includes material questions. Aristotle
    notes in this connection, that it is the unjust man who
    pursues more than his fair share. But this is not
    grounded in a principle of distributive equality as
    such. What is good for the individual is not always the
    same – and so getting one's fair share here involves the
    qualitative question of what is appropriate. Again, we
    are not far away from the ethical question.
38. ibid p.60; 1253a
39. L.Strauss (1964) p.47
40. Aristotle (1951) p.59; 1253a
41. We see this in the context of Aristotle's criticisms of
    abstract democracy. The Spartan system of popular
    representation ignores qualitative questions. Popular
    representation is desirable but we must retain a
    reference to judgment based upon law. The problem with
    the Spartan representatives, for Aristotle, is that
    their way of life is inconsistent with the constitution –
    ibid p.146; 1270b
    We need good citizens and the criterion here is that a
    good citizen makes the law his own law: and this is
    not a purely 'legalistic' criterion. Part of the problem
    with the Spartans was that they were unwilling to choose
    the representatives or leaders on the basis of their
    personal life and conduct – ibid p.147; 1271a. Thus
    moral character again proves relevant and the mode of

judgment in this context is provided by whether or not
it reveals itself to be consistent with the constitution.

42. Aristotle (1951) pp.179-183; 1276b-1277b

43. ibid p.181; 1277a

44. ibid p.182; 1277b

45. In this case, those who are ruled require only 'right
opinion' and not full practical reason.
See Aristotle (1976) p.182; 1277b16

46. Aristotle (1951) p.171; 1275b

47. ibid p.185; 1278b

48. Thus exclusion from full citizenship does not automatic-
ally render one morally bad. It does mean, on
Aristotle's terms, that one cannot be fully good. As
Sinclair notes, this might make the fully good man
somewhat rare given the necessary limits upon
citizenship specified by Aristotle even in the best of
states. See notes in Aristotle (1951) p.178

49. ibid p.298; 1301b

50. Aristotle (1951) p.392; 1323b

51. ibid p.202; 1281a

52. Aristotle's account of friendship is instructive here.
It is a form of recognition which is indispensible to
a good life and which is itself morally grounded:
"Good men alone can be friends" - Aristotle (1976)
p.267; 1157a. The point here is that one's attitude
toward a friend mirror those of a good man toward
himself - one's friend is really another self. One
sees in a friend the reflection of one's own humanity,
in so far as it enters into the world through one's
relation with the other. The important point here is
that the ability to relate oneself to the social world
as a substantive being is equally the ability to
recognise oneself. Base men forget themselves rather
than finding themselves in their relations with others.
To this extent friendship is not only a mode of
expressing virtue but also of developing it; friends
"help young men avoid error" (ibid p.258; 1155a) and
"enhance our ability to think and act" (ibid). Of course
friendship appears as a limited sphere; but it does
have a proto-political character and gains a more
generalized expression through 'concord', a political

relation founded upon things held in common (ibid
p.297; 1167a). This reveals the sense in which
Aristotle's view of politics specifies it as an object
for moral commitment and a means for self-development.

53. ibid p.347; 1314a
54. Aristotle (1976) p.199; 1137a
55. Aristotle (1962) p.142; 1138a
56. ibid
57. Aristotle (1951) p.324; 1307b
58. ibid
59. Beiner notes that the Arendtian view of the polis owes
    more to the Roman conception of public virtue than to
    the Aristotelian picture. See R.Beiner (1983) p.21
    The 'great deeds' which public life encourages on the
    part of participants freed from the concerns of private
    necessity seem to echo the Roman concern with martial
    virtues.
60. The characteristic political capacities, for Arendt are
    'speech' and 'action' which are distinct from the
    instrumental function of communication and the universal
    (and unremarkable) activity associated with survival.
    In this sense, politics represents a movement beyond the
    realm of necessity (which is equally the realm of the
    'household') toward a field of non-instrumental practice
    which is, just for that reason, a field within which
    individuals can distinguish themselves and recognise one
    another. When one speaks or acts politically, one
    equally communicates one's personality. See H.Arendt
    (1959) p.24
61. ibid p.64
62. Arendt affirms a sharp public-private distinction, such
    that the purity of goodness can be kept hidden from
    public life by its articulation in a purely private
    context. This sharp distinction helps to reveal the
    Kantian aspect of Arendt's thinking. As a realm which
    transcends particularity, the sphere of public judgments
    implies the adoption of an 'enlarged mentality'
    reminiscent of the Kantian account of judgment where
    one adopts the perspective of all. This connection,
    specified through attention to Kant's aesthetics, is
    pursued further in H.Arendt (1982)

This differs somewhat from the Aristotelian account, where judgment appears in a more deeply contextualised form.

63. On Arendt's account, material and domestic security is a pre-condition of participation in politics - in the classical context this amounts to a severe limitation upon those who can genuinely participate. In this sense, the possibility of making political life available appears as a product of the introduction of 'social' concerns into the public domain. Although Arendt still serves to remind us of the cost involved in this transformation.

64. J.Elster (1986) p.118

65. As Wick points out, although there is always room for conflict, there is no reason why both sorts of consideration should apply. See W.Wick (1971)

66. H.Arendt (1959) p.159

67. That this demand may prove too great is a view expressed by MacIntyre via the claim that a virtue which might appear as a vice in a different context cannot really be a virtue. This is so in that it does not simply contribute to an integrated pattern of life which supplies an answer to the question 'what is the best kind of life?' - MacIntyre (1985) p.275

68. For an analysis of these issues from the point of view of Marxism see T.O'Hagan (1981). For O'Hagan, the idea of a social revolution does not automatically negate the possibility that class differentiations might re-emerge. To this extent the idea of a consistent task of maintenance may apply as much to the image of communism as to any other political form.

69. S.Weil (1952) p.207

70. Aristotle (1976) p.174; 1129b

71. Arendt regards the closing scene of <u>Antigone</u> as exemplifying true public 'speech'. Creon's recognition of the weight of the tragedy at the same time implicates his own character.

72. Aristotle's ruler is relatively secure upon a foundation of natural relationships.

73. See J.G.Gunnell (1968) Ch.1; R.Orr (1972)

74. J.G.Gunnell(1968) pp. 288-289

75. Gunnell notes a crucial difference between Aristotelian
    and Platonic thought with respect to the relation
    between finitude and essence. In Aristotle, this
    problem is rendered an internal one - internal, that is,
    to human life in the city. The scene of the good, then,
    lies entirely in the city. Even the ultimate good of
    contemplation depends upon a civic culture. ibid p.289

76. R.Orr (1972) p.191

77. H.Arendt (1959) p.50

78. This is the source of Machiavelli's deep concern with
    the act of foundation. This issue is explored in
    B.J.Smith (1985)

79. Beiner notes, in a similar vein, that commensurability
    given by a common field of judgment does not exclude
    conflict - even tragic conflict. In fact, it may be a
    condition of conflict. Only where commensurability is
    taken to imply some common measure (in Utilitarianism,
    for example) is conflict thought to be excluded.

80. Part of the problem attaching to Machiavelli's prince lies
        precisely in the fact that he is a lone agent. This
    point also applies, in a slightly altered form, to
    Gramsci's conception of the party as the 'modern prince'.

81. H.G.Gadamer (1975) p.288: For Gadamer, this involves
    "not a general kind of knowledge but...its specification
    at a particular moment".

82. Theories, at a certain level will entail certain claims
    about theory itself. Wittgenstein's account in the
    Philosophical Investigations is suggestive of this fact
    in relation to the character of philosophy.
    These implications may not be evident; but the pictures
    and self-conceptions with which people operate will, if
    pressed, reveal a philosophical ballast which will
    contain such implications.

83. We can recall here the 'loss of identity' experienced
    by Rubashov in Darkness at Noon.

84. Beiner notes a similar point in relation to Aristotle's
    account of rhetoric. Rhetorical argument is designed
    to be effective but is not purely instrumental. In so
    far as it is practical, it refers to what is common in
    the public field. What distinguishes rhetoric is its

emphasis upon probability rather than certainty; in
this sense it removes the demand for proof.
See R.Beiner (1983) pp.95-101
To the extent that this lends a 'creative' dimension to
political discourse,we might note the sense in which
creativity requires a 'purchase' which frequently emerges
under conditions of adversity or opposition (no matter
what forms these might take). Creative freedom (like
social freedom) is wrongly understood on the model of
'ontological' freedom.

85. See F.Dallmayer (1974)

86. On the relationship between Aristotelian thought and
hermeneutics see H.G.Gadamer (1975) p.288

87. J.Habermas (1972) p.162

88. Habermas equates this approach with a scientifically
grounded account of human practice which in certain
contexts sanctions highly manipulative projects: ibid

89. It is in this sense that Habermas regards the
'hermeneutic circle' as a vicious circle only when it
is understood as a purely linguistic (or, for that
matter, purely empirical) affair.

90. As Taylor notes, the emphasis here is not simply upon
shared meanings, available to each of us, but more
than this, upon a substantial common world.
See C.Taylor (1971)
In this sense, there is an implied necessity that the
significance of a community be recognised in the context
of a mode of understanding which is not simply more
modest but is more self-conscious.

91. Marxism is of interest in this respect in so far as it
appears as a theory which takes account of the
conditions of its own existence. This is not to say
that Marxism is necessarily consistent with all forms
of hermeneutical analysis (for example, with linguistic
analysis).
Edgley regards all hermeneutical investigation as
inconsistent with the claims of Marxism in that it
leaves no room for a distinction between appearance
and reality. All cultures are assumed automatically
to be unitary and adequate and the category of

alienation disappears (see R.Edgley (1983) p.283)
However, on one level at least, cultures _are_ unitary
and adequate on Marx's view. False consciousness is not
merely untruth but rather derives from determinate
conditions and represents the best available 'response'
to those conditions. Further, where cultural ideology
becomes 'active', militating against progressive forces
in society, the latter 'reality' which is contrasted
with the former 'appearance', _emerges_, as we have noted,
in the form of a _demand_ and not simply as an empirical
reality which has always, in principle, been
discoverable.

The claim that a society cannot be comprehended and
assessed by reference to any set of foundational or
essentialist claims does not entail that no investig-
ation is possible. Intellectual and cultural traditions
may always be amenable to 'deconstruction'; and part of
this contextualizing process may bring historical and
socio-economic factors on to the agenda.

For a sustained analysis of the relationship between
Marxism and de-construction, see M.Ryan (1982). The
extent to which this relationship can be affirmed will
depend upon the particular interpretation of Marxism
one adopts. A heavily determinist interpretation must
ultimately be inconsistent with the hermeneutical
approach and would entail a scepticism with respect to
the usefulness of 'de-construction'. Equally, however,
we have seen that this version of Marxism is deeply
problematic with respect to the issue of political
morality.

The argument of the previous chapter entailed an
interpretation of Marx which would affirm the idea of
self-developing totalities as the most adequate mode of
characterising a society at any particular historical
stage. On this view, the grounding given by determining
economic factors proves less than compelling.

92. R.Rorty (1980) p.315

93. In a similar way, with respect to morality, Meszaros
    notes that the imperative represented by moral claims
    is a persistent feature of human practice which "sees
    itself as being superceded at infinity" - I.Meszaros
    (1970) p.281. On this view, the point is not to

assert the positive possibility of an identity between
subjective and objective; rather, it is a matter of the
form and significance attaching to the relationship
between the individual and the objective demands of
ethics (a form which may be historically _variable_ or
or as Marx puts it, "accidental" - see chapter VIII.)
Liberal perspectives generally tend to afford this
distinction a significance which is paramount and
foundational.

94. This point is made by Jacobson in relation to political
thought:

> "The political theorist has been tempted
> deliberately to blind himself to certain
> of the facts of life." - N.Jacobson (1978) p.2

95. We can recall here that the Aristotelian conception of
the 'mean' refers to the demand for the appropriate
expression or response in relation to the given
situation.

96. N.Jacobson (1978) p.154

X : Conclusion

The discussion has been informed by a central concern
with the bearing of moral sensibility upon the practice of
politics. It is a concern which may appear in more or less
specific forms which themselves generate interrelated
questions. However, in so far as the problem of 'dirty
hands' proves to be a central question with respect to
agents engaged in the characteristic practice of politics,
it reveals itself to be a fruitful mode of addressing a
range of related issues. As we have seen, the problem of
political morality emerges prominently from the modern
context in the form of radical terror. It would be possible
to treat this issue more independently, but when a more
general perspective is adopted, further questions arise.

Terror figures as a morally problematic manifestation
of political agency and as such is equally testament to a
wider problem. The condemnation of terror may in itself
be less than contraversial, but two factors serve to render
this an uneasy stopping-point. First, those responsible may
act with honourable motives, with courage and political
commitment. Second, the problem of appropriate criteria for
judgment here remains unresolved. Terror, as an object of
moral scrutiny, may be understood as an extension of the
more fundamental issue of morally problematic action in
politics. We are therefore steered back toward the issue
of 'dirty hands'.

On a general level, two points of view have emerged
from which the 'dirty hands' problem may be investigated.
First, in terms of the development of its intellectual
setting and formulation in the modern era; and second, in
terms of the manner in which the problem may fruitfully be
addressed from the point of view of agents (for whom the
problem may arise as an experience). As we have seen,
however, each of these modes of investigation raises the
further question of its relation with the other.

To the extent that an account of political morality
is available to the agent, certain practical orientations

may be made intelligible or validated and others ruled out.
Equally, however, particular accounts may simultaneously
generate implications on another level. Theoretical
accounts of the problem proceed from some standpoint which
implies itself further claims about the status of those
accounts themselves. This in turn is suggestive of a
perspective upon the relationship between the practice of
agents and the theories to which they may subscribe.

The examples of Kant and Mill demonstrate the manner
in which substantively different (even polarised) theories
of ethical life may bear a deeper relation to one another.
As we have seen, the 'purity' of Kantian ethics recommends
an 'unworldly' practical disposition which challenges
politics (and the virtues which might be understood to be
characteristic of political practice). The consequences of
such an approach may not be uniform, but are nevertheless
resonant of a severe difficulty. On the one hand, a
challenge of this character may (to the extent that its
demands are absolute and exhaustive) be a strong one in
appearance only, its weakness lying in the lack of the
'elasticity' demanded by 'worldly' imperative. On the other
hand, if moral judgment is banished from politics in one
guise, it may re-assert itself in another; and the authority
which attaches itself to an ethics of 'pure' intentions may
display a legitimizing power of its own. Thus, moral
references may appear in a form which validates abstractly-
grounded projects of a sort which pay scant attention to
the moral sensibilities of agents.

Considered in general terms, the Utilitarian approach,
although proceeding from radically different premisses,
reveals itself to be equally problematic with respect to
political morality. And the similarity it bears, in this
respect, to the Kantian approach alerts us to a common
perspective lying at a deeper level. We might characterise
this common strand as an impulse to supply a theoretical
solution to the problem of political morality. In this
sense, we can identify a common implication of a dominance
of theory with respect to practice.

This does not. of course, necessitate the existence of
an ostensible or self-conscious aim from the point of view
of the theorist. Both Kant and Mill considered themselves
to be representing the essence of actual moral practice.
However, there is a significance in the fact that the task
of theoretical representation is one conducted in a manner
which eschews qualitative multiplicity. It is in this
context that the 'imposition' of ethical blueprints upon
action in the world is ushered in as a way by which agents
may represent to themselves the form of their moral practice.
The problem of 'dirty hands' is correspondingly ushered out.

These considerations prompt renewed attention to the
issue of 'dirty hands' and a re-assessment of the ethical
orientations possible with respect to 'worldly' life. They
equally provide a background against which the deeper
('meta-theoretical') implications of such a re-assessment
are thrown into sharper relief. Not only the content but
also the form of reflection is implicated. In the former
sense, we are led toward a picture of moral agency which
does not entail the abolition of multiplicity and which
provides a deeper account of political morality. In the
latter sense, the question is raised as to the manner in
which theoretical representation relates to the immanent
self-conceptions and collective practice of agents.

An examination of the relationships between the demands
generated by action on the public plane and the moral
perspective of individual agents leads us toward the
re-introduction of certain crucial features of moral life
and identity which some theoretical approaches would presume
to transcend. It is on these grounds that the notion of
moral character becomes central. The picture of moral agency
which draws wholly upon an abstract schema for its sense
tends to deny a place for substantive moral character as a
focus for the encounter with moral conflict. When we take
the notion of character seriously, however, as a key element
in a general picture of moral agency, the problems of
conflict posed by political morality themselves appear in
a different light. Most significantly, the demand for

theoretical resolution generated by ethical theory understood
as a repository of coherent sets of problem-solving criteria,
is called into question. Moral difficulties entailed in
political agency are thereby more readily understood as
persistent difficulties (or burdens) _for_ the substantive
agent rather than as theoretical difficulties the solution
to which is a pre-condition of morally tenable practice. It
is in this context that the relationship between persistent
moral sensibility and the operability of limits in practice
becomes a relevant one.

In this sense, politics ceases readily to be rendered
morally unproblematic. Equally, those abstracted or
formalized dimensions to political practice reveal themselves
as inadequate to the task of solving inherent moral conflict
or difficulty. From the point of view of the character of
political agency, the danger here lies in the 'extravagant'
assumption that theorized solutions _are_ adequate. We are
thus led to place a considerable emphasis upon the moral
resources of agents as bearers of responsibility and
commitment.

A crucial question here is whether the problem of
political morality is one which can be kept in view by
agents. On a more general level, the question becomes that
of whether politics can be represented as an activity
falling within the range of characteristically human
practices - whether, in this sense, it is 'possible'
(-there is a certain inseparability here between the task of
fully grasping the character and scope of political agency
and the desire to 'humanise' it). Put in other terms, the
question is whether or how problems of political morality
may be understood as ones which can be borne by human beings
without appearing as an intrinsic threat to moral identity.
Koestler's Rubashov faces precisely such a threat - and this
condition appears ultimately to be related to the character
of his practical and reflective commitments. The latter
manifest, in a particular form, the impulse to transcend
'dirty hands' problems; and his moral consciousness suffers
accordingly.

We are also, in this sense, led toward a consideration

of the kinds of dispositions and capacities appropriate
to the arena of political agency. We have seen the sense
in which a tendency toward a certain sort of 'flexibility'
or openness in relation to one's moral engagement with
politics may be called for. There are a number of avenues
opened up thereby which a failure to contend with the full
depth and force of 'dirty hands' problems as they make
themselves felt for the agent tends to invalidate or
undermine. In the context of a field of collectively
founded public agency the possibility of a certain moral
'self-sacrifice' becomes prominent which is derived from the
demand to transcend oneself with respect to concrete
obligations and multiplicities. Equally, the theme of moral
change is rendered significant. The tendency toward
openness implies that the encounter with 'political reality'
may itself become an experientially educative process. For
this to be the case, a disposition toward moral 'magnanimity'
is prompted such that more self-regarding moral perspectives
(constitutive under certain conditions of a form of solipsism
and the impulse to transport 'private' obligations into
public ones) are offset.

The point here is not to reject the idea of moral
consistency but rather to reconsider the form that
consistency might take. We have noted the manner in which
consistent adherence to or application of abstract,
foundational rules may prove inadequate to the task of
political agency. The consequent possibility that
consistency may alternatively gain a purchase in the light
of a more substantive moral character reflects equally upon
the relevance of 'honesty' here. Morally accessible forms
of political practice may demand of agents an honesty with
respect to their true moral situation and to the limits of
unitary moral judgments. In this sense equally, an
'intellectual' honesty is required in the context of the
recognition of 'worldly' multiplicity. In the practical
context, this appears as the possibility of recognising the
limits of moral individualism. In the absence of such
recognition, the perceived relationship between the self
and the world may be suggestive of hubris.

Again, the issue of the relationship between theoretical formulations and practice is invoked; and the implicit _form_ of this relationship as it makes itself felt in the implicit self-conceptions of agents becomes crucial. This resonates with the sense in which to understand oneself is not simply a matter of corresponsence but involves questions of 'authenticity' and 'self-possession'. Whether agents may fully recognise and bear the burden of 'dirty hands' depends upon the moral resources upon which they are able to draw. Where one acts in the grip of prior moral abstraction (which equally will define a particular moral self-conception) those resources which are dependent upon the flexibility of moral character and the exercise of multiple virtues are correspondingly dissolved. In this sense, where the practical context presses hard upon the commitments of agents or demand much of them; where, that is, commitments may need to be explicitly articulated or formulated, commitments of an 'abstract' sort become ominously fragile.

It becomes apparent, in this sense, that a full reconsideration of the nature of the 'dirty hands' problem generates implications for the manner in which agents understand their relationship to it in practice. In a similar way, implications are generated for the manner in which we understand politics more generally. This issue appears in so far as the sorts of resources to which this account of political morality might refer are themselves internally related to the idea of a community.

Given the character of the argument in general, it would appear self-defeating to posit an alternative theoretical construction specifying a non-alienated political form. Rather, the emphasis here must be upon what a community is capable of embodying, what it may meaningfully call upon and the corresponding manner in which citizenship might relate to identity. Although it is in this context that the character or modernity becomes significant. To the extent that ideas and theoretical orientations are founded in and directed toward practice, the character of modern political association presents a hurdle to accounts of political morality which refers to the possibility of a coherent

public virtue. The motifs of individualism and political
instrumentality testify to the serious challenge presented
by modernity to a re-statement of, for example, classical
themes. In this light, the notion of immediately compelling,
habitualised moral recognitions comes to appear less
convincing - such structures of immediate and exhaustive
moral response can only re-appear directly in the form of
a compulsion. Thus, critical reflective agendas remain as
an intrinsic feature of our moral horizon.

Here the writings of Marx demand serious attention
because   Marx presents a challenge to much modern thinking
concerning politics and morality (a challenge which equally
and for similar reasons serves to distinguish his position
from that frequently adopted by revolutionary movements in
practice). A focus upon these distinctions proves valuable
not least because it highlights a number of crucial issues
which demand our attention from the point of view of a concern
with political life (and its relation with moral expression).
In the light of a rejection of blueprints or sets of
principles as modes of founding political life or informing
political projects, we are led toward an emphasis upon the
character of citizenship in the context of a moral culture.
It is in this context that questions concerning the
synchronic and diachronic dimensions to the instantiation
of virtue and responsibility may be explored.

On the more general level, the issue of the character
of theory is once more implicated. The above remarks suggest
the sense in which our thinking about political life - its
theoretical representation - may occupy a 'limited' role
with respect to its concrete expression. However, it would
be an oversimplification to understand this in terms of a
prior limitation upon the phenomena about which we can
legitimately reflect. Rather, it appears as a matter of
coming to a renewed understanding of what it is to reflect
theoretically - in other words, to render it as a self-
conscious practice which takes its place within the range
of human experience and which 'integrates' with substantive
human practice as a whole (rather than transcending it).

Crucial here is the sense in which reflection upon social
life may equally be understood as articulating a form of
self-reflection. (This equally suggests a sense in which
theory has a mediating role with respect to self-conscious
human practice).

This also draws to our attention the relationship
between moral individuals and their characteristic practices
or projects. It is in this context, where the moral
resources of individuals may find application in the sphere
of a community, that moral limits with respect to political
judgment and agency might gain a purchase. These
considerations testify to the central importance of the
'dirty hands' problem. To investigate the full depth of
the problem and its qualitative character resonates with
a questioning of key aspects of modern suppositions
concerning politics and morality. The associated questioning
of the primacy of theory as a mode of resolving the tasks of
collective human practice prompts a focus upon the resources
of individuals which, within an appropriate field of
expression, more readily evoke a multiplicity of human
practices and situations the implications of which can be
countenanced by an authentic human sensibility.

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