Dirty Hands: The One and the Many

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The problem of "dirty hands" has appeared in the literature of political philosophy only relatively recently. No doubt this is connected to the fact that, as Alasdair MacIntyre points out, far more has been written on the theme of moral dilemmas in the past fifty years or so than in all the time from Plato until then.[1] Talk of dirty hands, after all, is the application of this theme to politics. Listen to what Hoederer, in Sartre's play of the same name, has to say about it:

> How you cling to your purity, young man! How afraid you are to soil your hands! All right, stay pure! What good will it do? Why did you join us? Purity is an idea for a yogi or a monk. You intellectuals and bourgeois anarchists use it as a pretext for doing nothing. To do nothing, to remain motionless, arms at your sides, wearing kid gloves. Well, I have dirty hands. Right up to the elbows. I've plunged them in filth and blood. But what do you hope? Do you think you can govern innocently?[2]

Hoederer's last question can apply not only to the matter of ongoing governance but also to crisis situations such as the "ticking time bomb" scenario, which has become prominent in the literature. Imagine you're a well-meaning elected political leader and your security forces have captured a terrorist. He knows the location of a recently planted bomb but he refuses to divulge it. If the bomb explodes many innocent people, whose safety is your responsibility, will surely die. Yet there seems to be no way of getting the necessary information without torturing the terrorist – and torture, you believe, is deeply wrong. What to do? Whichever you choose, moral taint seems inescapable.

The metaphysical theme of "the One and the Many" is, of course, anything but young, but I believe there's much to be gained from bringing it together with dirty hands. It has been formulated

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[1] See MacIntyre, "Moral Dilemmas," in *Ethics and Politics: Selected Essays, Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 85.

[2] Sartre, *Dirty Hands*, trans. I. Abel, in *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (New York: Random House, 1976), p. 218.

differently over the centuries, so I should begin by specifying how I do so. There seem to be four basic alternatives, four different conceptions of "monism" and "pluralism." One is based on the question of *numerical existence*: how many entities are there, one or many?[3] Another is a matter of *mereological priority*: ultimately, do wholes depend upon their parts or vice-versa, making what's really fundamental either the plural parts of the universe or the one whole?[4] The third is concerned with *kind*: is there, or is there not, a plurality of fundamentally different entities given their qualities, attributes, or characteristics?[5] The fourth and last alternative – which I believe includes, even sometimes entails, the others – is the one that I will be using here. It asks about the *degree of connection* between entities: are entities cohesive and so, together, do they exhibit a oneness, that is, constitute a unity; are they disconnected and fragmented, constituting a plurality; or are they somehow both?

I want to refer to this conception with a neologism, *hiburology*, which has the Hebrew word for "connection" (*hibur*, חיבור) as its root. Unity and plurality were central preoccupations of ancient Judaism – or at least they were ever since Moses declared, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God. The Lord is One" (Deut. 6:4).[6] By contrast, mainstream ancient Greek thought was able to focus on mereology as much as it did because it took monism largely for granted. "A sense of the wholeness of things," writes H.D.F. Kitto, "is perhaps the most typical feature of the Greek mind."[7] That this is no longer so typical suggests, along with the rise of questions about moral dilemmas, that there has been an important shift in Western civilization's ongoing balancing act between Athens and Jerusalem. Be that as it may, let's turn to the question of dirty hands.

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[3] See, for example, Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 988b20–989a18 on numerical monists, and 989a20–b20 on numerical pluralists.

[4] For a recent defense of priority monism, see Jonathan Schaffer, "Monism: The Priority of the Whole," *Philosophical Review* 119 (2010): 31–76; for priority pluralism, see E.J. Lowe, *The Four-Category Ontology: A Metaphysical Foundation for Natural Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[5] This was Christian Wolff's implicit question when, in 1721, he coined the term "monists (*monisten*)" to refer to those for whom all existence is either idealist or materialist. See the second preface to his *Vernünfftige Gedancken von Gott, Der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, Auch allen Dingen überhaupt*, ed. Charles A. Corr (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1983).

[6] Note that the Hebrew word I've translated as "One" here is not *yakhid* (יחיד), which means "singular" in both the numerical sense and that of uniqueness, but *ekhad* (אחד), which can mean one both numerically and as oneness, the hiburological quality of being fully cohesive, hence unified or united.

[7] Kitto, *The Greeks* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1951), p. 169.

It is my contention that the different ways of responding to the question correspond to different positions as regards hiburology. Those sceptical about talk of inescapable dirty hands are all monists. To the orthodox among them, the unity of the practical world, the fact that all of its values ultimately fit together, means that there always exists a clean solution to every dilemma. To the unorthodox, there may be times when, the world being what it is, we are unable to avoid dirtying our hands; but at least the world can – in principle – be changed, indeed unified, thereby eliminating the problem of dirty hands. Pluralists take the opposite position: to them, the fragmentation of practical reality means that all genuine conflicts are, and always will be, irreconcilable, so the best we can do when faced with one is to strike a compromise, to reach an accommodation that will be more or less dirty. All this differs from those who paradoxically combine both pluralism and monism. To "pluramonists," as I call them, while it's often possible to take a unified and so clean approach, there will be times, indeed a plurality of them, when exceptions must be made and so our hands unavoidably get dirtied. Also different are the (often overlooked) nihilists, for whom we should be upholding neither the One, nor the Many, nor a paradoxical combination of the two; rather, what we should accept is none other than the None. When we do we will see that, given the reality of moral void, anything goes, and that's why there is no need to worry about dirty hands.

Then there's the approach that I favour, which aims to move in between monism and pluralism. According to it, when faced with a conflict we should attempt a reconciliation, the clean integration of the values involved, so as to bring them closer to (though perhaps never quite reaching) a unified state. That said, it could very well be the case that, no matter how much we manage to change the world, reconciliation will be possible only some of the time. Unlike the pluralist, however, I don't assume that this is our inevitable lot. I also believe that struggling for an accommodation only *after* one has attempted a reconciliation constitutes a far more realistic approach, since who, after all, *prefers* dirtying their hands? I won't argue extensively for this position here, however, so much as hope that it gains plausibility from the logical space it occupies on the intellectual map that I shall be presenting. For the map embodies a taxonomy that, I believe, improves upon the often implicit ones on offer within the various writings on dirty hands so far.

Monism, Orthodox and Unorthodox

The largest amount of space on this map is occupied by the various monist approaches, for, to state the obvious, monism has long been dominant in Western philosophy (there's even a journal named after it). According to the orthodox monist, talk of dirty hands ultimately reflects nothing more than "conceptual confusion."[8] Since there's always, in principle, a solution to any moral dilemma, it follows that there's always a clean, right thing to do. Of course, one may suffer from what Aristotle calls a tragic flaw and so be too stupid, weak-willed, or wicked to either find the solution or to carry it out, but that is another matter. As any dilemma's parts are necessarily those of a unified whole, doing the right thing cannot also consist of doing wrong – or at least not in the deep sense that should lead anyone to speak of guilt or invoke metaphors of dirty hands. True, compromises may have to be made along the way, but if they are carried out as part of a good action then there will be nothing immoral about them. One may end up feeling regret, but shame or remorse have no place since one will, again, have done nothing wrong.

Orthodox monists can be divided into two groups: there are those, the mainstream, who are theorists, in the sense that they aim for relatively fixed, unified intellectual visions, and there are those who are not. The latter, whom I plan to consider first, can be identified as Heracliteans given their adherence to one form or other of the Presocratic's doctrine of the unity of opposites.[9] And though Machiavelli is usually read as the archetypal dirty-hands theorist, given his famous recommendation that political leaders must learn "how not to be virtuous,"[10] my claim is that he neither acknowledges the problem of dirty hands nor is a theorist. For I class him with the Heracliteans.

Both Isaiah Berlin and Michael Walzer interpret Machiavelli differently. To Berlin, Machiavelli is "one of the makers of pluralism" since he recognizes two separate, valid moralities: that of political life and that of Christianity. Machiavelli himself opts for the first over the second: "I love my native city more than my own soul," he states. Berlin nevertheless thinks that

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[8] Kai Nielsen, "There Is No Dilemma of Dirty Hands," in Paul Rynard and David P. Shugarman, eds., *Cruelty and Deception: The Controversy over Dirty Hands in Politics* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2000), p. 140.

[9] See G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, 2nd ed.), ch. 6, nos. 199–209. Note how the doctrine is an instance of itself: "doctrine," a belief or set of beliefs, implies unity, and what's unified are two opposites, namely "unity" and "opposites" (when, that is, the latter implies a form of disunity).

[10] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. George Bull (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981), ch. XV.

Machiavelli goes astray, not so much because of this monolatry (one that, incidentally, Max Weber came to share) as because of his assumption that each of these moralities forms a unity. This makes Machiavelli's approach a version of cultural pluralism (or at least dualism) that stops short of the more fine-grained, value pluralism that Berlin himself favours. To Berlin, no culture can be unified, since each contains a multiplicity of sometimes incompatible values. Berlin consequently views Machiavelli as "guilty of much confusion," since he appears to advance two inconsistent claims. On the one (clean) hand, he thinks that by making a clear choice for politics over Christianity we avoid moral squeamishness through eliminating any qualms we might have about difficult political decisions; it's for this reason that, as Berlin puts it, "there is no trace of agony in his political works." On the other (dirty) hand, however, Machiavelli appears to be aware that sometimes "great sacrifices" have to be made, since in "killing, deceiving, betraying, Machiavelli's princes and republicans are doing evil things, not condonable in terms of common morality. It is Machiavelli's great merit that he does not deny this." For his part, Berlin would have us recognize that the political necessity of compromising common moral precepts means that value pluralism, and not only cultural pluralism, is inevitable. Thus does the dirty hand defile the clean one, making a sense of agony inescapable.[11]

By contrast, according to Walzer (or at least to how I read him), Machiavelli fully acknowledges the problem of dirty hands, and he does so not because his political ethic is ultimately pluralistic, made up of no more than separate, incompatible units, but because it is "paradoxical." As I conceive of this, the claim is that sometimes there's an incompatibility between the political ethic's parts and the whole, one so acute that it can challenge the unity of the whole. The whole is what is upheld by the man who hopes "to found or reform a republic," whereas its parts are those "moral standards" reflected in Machiavelli's "consistent use of words like good and bad." Machiavelli, then, affirms the One and the Many, together, and he does so in a way which makes room for inescapable moral dirtiness. This is why Walzer says that, for Machiavelli, the

[11] The Machiavelli quotation is from his 16 April 1527 letter to Francesco Vettori, in *The Letters of Machiavelli: A Selection of His Letters*, ed. and trans. Allan Gilbert (New York: Capricorn Books, 1961), p. 249; the other quotations are from Berlin, "The Originality of Machiavelli," in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013, 2nd ed.), pp. 99, 61, 71, 79, 69. Weber's monolatry comes to the fore with his claim that "The 'culture' of the individual certainly does not consist of the *quantity* of 'cultural values' which he amasses; it consists of an articulated *selection* of culture values." Weber, "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 356.

man who would take the necessary risks for power and glory must be ready to become someone whose "personal goodness…*is thrown away*." It's also why Walzer is, like Berlin, disturbed by the fact that we hear nothing from Machiavelli about his hero's inner distress: "we want a record of his anguish, but he has no inwardness. What he thinks of himself we don't know." And we don't because, supposedly, he's too busy basking in his glory. Walzer, then, offers us a different reason than Berlin for Machiavelli's complacency: it's not so much that he's confused as that his moral sensibility is suspect.[12]

I think both Berlin and Walzer misread Machiavelli. That he's no theorist we can all agree, for theorists are none other than those who "have dreamed up republics and principalities which have never in truth been known to exist," since they fail "to represent things as they are in real truth, rather than as they are imagined." Machiavelli's alternative is still monistic, however, because it is Heraclitean. Two things suggest this right away. There's his consistent affirmation of unity, as with his typically classical republican equation of self-interested factions with corruption and his recommendation that the prince avoid fostering them. And there's his embrace of dynamic conflict, given the benefits that he believes accrue from strife between classes – classes which, because they fight over nothing other than how best to fulfil the common good, manage to avoid devolving into pluralizing factions.[13]

So there is a unified common good at the centre of Machiavelli's favoured form of life (which, incidentally, comprises the politics of a republic rather than a principality: "government by the populace is better than government by princes"). To see how this conforms to Heraclitus' doctrine of the unity of opposites we need to appreciate how its virtues, in order to be the virtues that they are, depend upon their opposition to each other, which is why they can also appear as vices. Consider ruthlessness. It is because men are, alas, what they are that Machiavelli believes those who would affirm the Christian virtues in politics will bring everyone to ruin. The political leader must thus be ruthless, and this requires virility, steely determination, mercilessness, even cruelty.

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[12] The quotations are all from Walzer's "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands," in *Thinking Politically: Essays in Political Theory*, ed. David Miller (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 284, 289–90.

[13] The quotations are all from Machiavelli's *The Prince*, ch. XV. Disapproval of factions can be found in his *The Discourses*, ed. Bernard Crick, trans. Leslie J. Walker and Brian Richardson (London: Penguin Books, 1970), I.7, I.50, as well as in *The Prince*, ch. XX; and approval of strife in *The Discourses*, I.4. Few have done as much as Claude Lefort to help us appreciate the centrality of conflict for Machiavelli, though he goes too far when he describes this in terms of "disunity": *Machiavelli in the Making*, trans. Michael Smith (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2012), pp. 224, 227.

Notice that the first two of these four are necessary at least partly because of the other two: if mercilessness and cruelty weren't so terrible, hence so difficult, then there would be no need for virility and steely determination. It's only because ruthlessness involves vices that it also involves virtues, leaving us with a conception of the four as contrastively defined parts of a seemingly unified whole. And so it is that, when the prince ends up "taking everything into account, he will find that some of the things that appear to be virtues will, if he practices them, ruin him, and some of the things that appear to be vices will bring him security and prosperity" – and not only him since, as Machiavelli puts it just a few sentences earlier, the apparent vices are also "necessary for safeguarding the state." Evidently, the division between appearance and reality is playing a major role here, but unlike the many theorists who also rely upon it Machiavelli wants to embrace *both* sides. For it, too, is a unity of opposites: the superficial dimension of what shows up, where we encounter *prima facie* virtues and vices that contradict each other, is encompassed by the deeper, unified reality that makes it possible for us to keep our hands clean. Accordingly, whenever the prince finds that he cannot avoid certain "vices," Machiavelli tells us that he "need not worry so much" about them.[14]

This, then, is why we hear nothing from Machiavelli about agony or inner anguish. He may indeed be confused, or have a questionable moral sense, or both, but not for the reasons that Berlin or Walzer give. For there is an overall, Heraclitean coherence to his approach. Machiavelli is a cultural pluralist who conceives of cultures as monistic, and of his preferred culture as an island, a unified "Machiavellian moment" amidst the flowing, chaotic waters of Fortuna-driven history. This is contradictory, to be sure, but in a way that is neither pluralistic nor paradoxical.[15]

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[14] The quotation in which Machiavelli favours republics over principalities is from *The Discourses*, I.58; those following are all from *The Prince*, ch. XV. Machiavelli invokes a similar logic of cleanliness as regards those who would *found* a republic or principality: "It is a sound maxim that reprehensible actions may be justified by their effects, and that when the effect is good, as it was in the case of Romulus, it always justifies the action. For it is the man who uses violence to spoil things, not the man who uses it to mend them, that is blameworthy." *The Discourses*, I.9. Incidentally, Machiavelli also believes that friends and enemies form unities of opposites, which is why "a prince will never have any difficulty in winning over those who were initially his enemies," since princes in general "have found men who were suspect at the start of their rule more loyal and more useful than those who, at the start, were their trusted friends." *The Prince*, ch. XX.

[15] I first presented an account of Machiavelli along these lines in *From Pluralist to Patriotic Politics: Putting Practice First* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 146–47. "Machiavellian moment" comes, of course, from J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, 2nd ed.).

Next in line among the Heracliteans are the dialecticians Hegel and Marx, for whom, like Machiavelli, all necessary evil is ultimately redeemable and therefore clean. However, in their case this is understood to come about through progressive history, which has yet to culminate. True, Hegel believes we've already reached the final reconciliation ("I am already familiar with the whole," he says) but he restricts this to "the calm region of contemplation" as it has yet to manifest within "the History of the World, with all the changing scenes which its annals present." And Marx would, of course, be among the first to point out that we have still not achieved a classless society. We get there, though, through a revolutionary process that purifies, allowing those who've completed the preparations for it to no longer have to "jump up and cry: Well grubbed up, old mole!"[16] So Lucien Goldmann seems to me to exaggerate only slightly when he suggests that, for both Hegel and Marx, "evil becomes the only path that leads to goodness."[17]

I think we can say the same of Nietzsche, who shares much with Machiavelli.[18] Not that Nietzsche is a cultural pluralist, since his is a universal rather than partial monism. Moreover, Nietzsche is not only atheoretical but downright antitheoretical. As he says of himself, "I distrust all systematisers and avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity."[19] It is because theoretical systems are unable to accommodate truly transformative change, the kind that affects every part, that they inevitably break down; they become decadent, which, according to the late nineteenth century writers of the Decadent movement, consists of the "subordination of the whole

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[16] Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), in *Later Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 115; see also Robbie Shilliam, "Marx's Path to 'Capital': The International Dimension of an Intellectual Journey," *History of Political Thought* 27, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 349–75, pp. 367–74. For a recent, explicitly monist defense of Marxism, see Landon Frim and Harrison Fluss, "Reason is Red: Why Marxism Needs Philosophy," *Spectre*, 29 August 2022.

[17] Hegel, "Manuscripts of the Introduction," in *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, vol. 1: *Greek Philosophy to Plato*, trans. E.S. Haldane (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995 [1892]), 142 (p. 80); and *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956 [1899]), p. 457. As Emil L. Fackenheim remarks, to Hegel the modern world "is in principle final, but it is final in principle only"; or as he also puts it, Spirit is reconciled with the actual world "in thought only – not in life." Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), pp. 213, 234. The Goldmann quotation is from his *The Human God: A Study of the Tragic Vision in the* Pensées *of Pascal and the Tragedies of Racine*, trans. Philip Thody (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 301.

[18] See, for example, Don Dombowsky, *Nietzsche's Machiavellian Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), ch. 4; and Diego A. von Vacano, *The Art of Power: Machiavelli, Nietzsche, and the Making of Aesthetic Political Theory* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007).

[19] "Arrows and Epigrams," § 26, in *Twilight of the Idols, or How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, § 5, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

for the benefit of its parts."[20] Hence Nietzsche's assertion that, when it comes to the writings of theorists,

> life does not reside in the totality any more. The word becomes sovereign and jumps out of the sentence, the sentence reaches out and blots out the meaning of the page, the page comes to life at the expense of the whole – the whole is not whole any more. But this is the image of every decadent style: there is always an anarchy of the atom…[21]

Pluralism, in other words. It is in order to fight it that Nietzsche adopts an aphoristic style. Some would consider this counterproductive, or at the very least ironic, since the style's fragmentariness appears to be inherently pluralistic.[22] But once we follow Karl Jaspers and recognize that Heraclitus is "*the* philosopher to Nietzsche," precisely because of the centrality he gives to "the strife of opposites," then we can appreciate how the conflicting meanings asserted by Nietzsche's aphorisms are meant to embody a kind of unity, the very one alluded to by Jaspers when he points out that "*self-contradiction* is the fundamental ingredient in Nietzsche's thought."[23] And so, when we are faced with a moral dilemma, Nietzsche would have us do anything but wring our hands over the possibility of soiling them; what we should do is simply get over it, even welcome the dilemma as an opportunity to embrace tragic joy. Evidently, Nietzsche shares with pluralists a rejection of the ascetic moral purity idealized by theorists. But his "realist" alternative is nevertheless very different from theirs. Where pluralists emphasize dirtiness and so (what I would consider) genuine tragedy, Nietzsche is guilt-free, shame-free, indeed (I would say) tragedy-free. For just as "the holy saint" has the "highest instinct of cleanliness," which is "a noble tendency," Nietzsche believes that his own hands can remain immaculate.[24]

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[20] J.E. Chamberlin, *Ripe Was the Drowsy Hour: The Age of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), p. 95.

[21] Nietzsche, "The Case of Wagner: A Musician's Problem," § 7, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*.

[22] As Gilles Deleuze assumes in his *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 31.

[23] Jaspers, *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity*, trans. Charles F. Wallraff and Frederick J. Schmitz (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), pp. 350, 10. For an alternative but still monistic reading, one that fails to distinguish Nietzsche enough from Plato, see Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), ch. 2.

[24] Nietzsche traces the birth and development of the moral theorist's "ascetic ideal" in his *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 2nd ed.). For

As mentioned, the theoretical monist's hands are supposedly no dirtier.[25] There are three main traditions here. The oldest is that of virtue ethics, with Aristotle its greatest proponent. His theory, which emphasizes the kind of person one ought to be, consists of an account of the virtues as well as of the prudential reasoning (*phronēsis*) necessary for achieving human well-being (*eudaimonia*) whenever a conflict has made it impossible to express the virtues by mere unreflective habit. *Eudaimonia* is the supreme good which contains and orders all the others; it is the target of prudential reason, which is concerned strictly with how to aim the arrow, since "the end cannot be a subject of deliberation, but only the means." And it is because this end is unified, universal, and unchanging that we may give an account of it with theoretical reason (*thēoria*). Not that its unity is as tight as the one asserted by Plato's Socrates, for whom the various virtue terms are but different names for the same thing (*Prot.* 329C–D); still, Aristotle's doctrine of the unity of the virtues tells us that when we have one virtue fully we can avoid compromising any of the others (*Eth. Nic.* 1144b33–45a2). While contemporary virtue ethicists such as MacIntyre do not accept such a strong version of the doctrine, they still believe that every dilemma can, at least in principle, be resolved and so that every truly virtuous act must contribute to the well-being of the actor as well as to the common good of his or her political community. If, when faced with a moral or political conflict, we manage to take full account of the particulars and so act as the virtuous person would, then our actions will be praiseworthy and there will be no stain on our character. Those who are truly noble or magnanimous can thus suffer the worst misfortunes imaginable and yet "even here what is fine shines through," since no such person "could ever become miserable" (*Eth. Nic.* 1100b30–31, 34–35; see also 1166a29).[26]

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a pluralist critique of purity as the basic attitude of morality, defined as the domain within ethics limited to obligatory actions and which insists "on abstracting the moral consciousness from other kinds of emotional reaction or social influence," see Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), esp. p. 195. Maudemarie Clark nevertheless misses how different are Nietzsche and Williams' alternatives to morality: *Nietzsche on Ethics and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), ch. 2. Finally, Nietzsche's description of "the holy saint" is from *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, eds. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, trans. Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), § 271.

[25] Some of what follows expands upon my entry, "Dirty Hands," in Hugh LaFollette, ed., *International Encyclopedia of Ethics* (Hoboken, NJ and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014).

[26] The metaphor of aiming an arrow at a target is from *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094a24; and the quote about deliberating only as regards means is at 1112b34–1113a1. I put MacIntyre's discomfort with the strong version of the doctrine of the unity of the virtues down to his relatively atomistic conception of virtues, which is reflected in his willingness to accept the possibility of talking undisturbedly about the idea of a courageous Nazi as well as in his movement from parts to whole (i.e. "From the Virtues to Virtue" as one of his chapter titles puts it) rather than the other way around. See *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007, 3rd ed.), pp. 179–80, 226. Philippa Foot gestures at what's problematic about such positions when, regarding the

The second theoretical monist tradition is that of consequentialists such as utilitarians. While they also reject the problem of dirty hands on the basis of a unified theory, it is one for which all justification ultimately depends upon achieving a certain state of affairs, the maximization of the happiness or utility of the greatest number. Though they differ over whether we should be focusing directly on the acts which produce the most utility or on the rules whose general observance will lead to doing so, all can be said to endorse the idea that since "utility is the ultimate source of moral obligations, utility may be invoked to decide between them when their demands are incompatible."[27] By affirming utility as a master value, then, the unity of all ethics and politics is assured and we can know precisely what's required for further perfecting the world. Unlike with the third theoretical tradition, however, that of the deontologists led by Kant, this is assumed to be a *necessarily* infinite and so interminable task, since there can always be more utility. Still, as long as everything we do contributes to maximizing it, then any compromises we make along the way should be considered clean.

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ascription of "courageous" to certain albeit wicked acts, she says: "It is not easy to put one's finger on what is wrong, but it has something to do with a disparity between the [abstract, atomist] moral ideals that may seem to be implied in our talk about the virtues, and the [contextual, holist] moral judgements that we actually make." Foot, "Virtues and Vices," in *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 17. As for MacIntyre on ethical dilemmas, except for his talk of the narrative unity of human life, his position used to be even more open to pluralism and tragedy than the one based on his (mistaken) reading of Sophocles (a reading which is much like that which I associate with Plato below). According to it, although we live in a unified moral order that guarantees the solubility of all dilemmas, we may fail to perceive it properly. See *After Virtue*, pp. 142–45; and, for a more accurate, because pluralist, account of Sophocles, see Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 160ff; as well as Apfel, *The Advent of Pluralism: Diversity and Conflict in the Age of Sophocles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), chs. 6–9. MacIntyre later came to adopt the more optimistic, thoroughly monist picture which he identifies with Thomas Aquinas: e.g. "Moral Dilemmas." As for why, *pace* Michael Stocker's *Plural and Conflicting Values* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) and Martha Nussbaum's *Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 2nd ed.), Aristotle would reject both the appearance and reality of the problem of dirty hands, see Karen M. Nielsen, "Dirtying Aristotle's Hands? Aristotle's Analysis of 'Mixed Acts' in the *Nichomachean Ethics* III, 1," *Phronesis* 52 (2007): 270–300; and Paula Gottlie, *The Virtue of Aristotle's Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), ch. 6.

[27] John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ed. George Sher (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1979 [1861]), p. 25; see also *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1882, 8th ed.), bk. VI, ch. XII, § 7, where Mill writes that "There must be some standard by which to determine the goodness or badness, absolute and comparative, of ends, or objects of desire. And whatever that standard is, there can be but one; for if there were several ultimate principles of conduct, the same conduct might be approved by one of those principles and condemned by another; and there would be needed some more general principle, as umpire between them...[Now] the general principle to which all rules of practice ought to conform, and the test by which they should be tried, is that of conduciveness to the happiness of mankind, or rather, of all sentient beings; in other words, that the promotion of happiness is the ultimate principle of Teleology." See also Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1981, 7th ed. [1907]), bk. IV, ch. II.

As for those deontologists, they believe we can keep our hands clean by respecting certain formal principles rather than by promoting some end. Kant's ethics, it's well known, is based upon a theory of liberty according to which we're free when rationally autonomous, when our wills conform to the law as determined by practical reason. At such times, we can be said to live in the moral order that Kant famously called "the kingdom of ends," which consists of "a systematic union of various rational beings through common laws."[28] And given that "a *collision of duties* and obligations is inconceivable,"[29] we should expect never to be confronted by dilemmas – whether within us or between us – that would make dirtying our hands inescapable. To be sure, there will be times when we have to face diverging incentives and make difficult choices, but it remains entirely up to us whether we will opt for the good maxims that conform to the moral law.[30] When we do, our natural inclinations "will not wear each other out but will instead be harmonized into a whole called happiness."[31] However, when we don't, Kant goes so far as to suggest that those who, say, help others because they prioritize a sense of sympathy for their plight over duty are, quite simply, evil.[32]

It's because Kant conceives of this moral order as an abstract ideal that I consider it aesthetic rather than practical. Kant himself refers to the idea of the ethical community as "sublime," given that it's populated by the only beings in the universe who have "inner worth" due to their each being an "end in itself." For we are the ones capable giving ourselves laws, maxims independent of all incentive which thereby manifest "sublimity" in both the laws and those who follow them. This is why we should be filled with "admiration and reverence" for not only the "*starry heavens above*" but also "*the moral law within*."[33]

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[28] *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:433, in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). At 6:101 of *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: And Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Kant says that the kingdom is "founded on principles that necessarily lead it to universal union in a single church (hence, no sectarian schisms)."

[29] *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:224, in *Practical Philosophy*.

[30] See, for example, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:44.

[31] Ibid., 6:58.

[32] See ibid., 6:31–37; and the discussion in Richard J. Bernstein, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), pp. 17–19. Indeed, Kant goes even further: the propensity to do this is a kind of evil that is "*radical*, since it corrupts the ground of all maxims." *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:37. I'm mentioning this only in a footnote since it strikes me as preposterous.

[33] "[S]ublime" is from *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:100; "inner worth" and "end in itself" are from *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:435; "sublimity" of the laws and of those who follow them is

Schiller takes this aesthetic appreciation of those able to follow the moral law further than Kant, since he thinks we're also sublime because of our ability to go against our natural inclinations and follow the law, though only when we manage to do so spontaneously, with grace rather than through struggle; only then can we be said to have a "beautiful soul."[34] Schiller makes this claim because he considers Kant's conception of moral virtue inadequate given its failure to recognize that our ability to impose moral rules on ourselves is insufficient for true freedom; reason must be made *complimentary* with sensibility, since only those who can act dutifully with ease can be considered free. This harmonious unity is achieved in "play" and, when it is, we call it "beauty." It is because Kant gives priority to moral duty that, while he's willing to grant "a *feeling of the sublimity* of our own vocation that enraptures us more than any beauty," he also freely admits that he is "unable to associate *gracefulness* with the *concept of duty*."[35]

We will have to return to aesthetics later, after we've finished visiting with the monist theorists. In the meantime, I want to point out how, when it comes to the extramoral world, Kant appears ambivalent about whether it can be made to conform to the ideal. Sometimes he says it cannot, as with his famous declaration that this constitutes "the hardest task of all; indeed, its perfect solution is impossible; from such warped wood as is man made, nothing straight can be fashioned."[36] However sometimes he's more optimistic, as when he assures us that "in the end….the pure faith of religion will rule over all, 'so that God may be all in all'."[37] Either way, politics cannot be counted on to get us there, since, unlike the private realm of morality or "virtue," in the public realm of "right" or "justice" law is applied coercively.[38] Still, because this coercion

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from ibid., 4:425, 439–40, respectively; and "admiration and reverence" for the "*starry heavens above*" is from *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:161, in *Practical Philosophy.*

[34] Schiller, *On Grace and Dignity*, trans. George Gregory, in *Poet of Freedom*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Schiller Institute, 1988), pp. 368–69; and see Michael Rosen, *Dignity: Its History and Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 30–38.

[35] See Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Reginald Snell (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004 [1794]), esp. letters 1, 6, 9, 14–15; and, on the dispute between Kant and Schiller, see Frederick C. Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher: A Re-Examination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), ch. 5. The Kant quote is from *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:23.

[36] Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent," in *Perpetual Peace: And Other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1983), p. 34; see also *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:100.

[37] *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:121; at 6:124 Kant writes that "the faith of moral religion…[is] the only faith which improves the soul – a claim which, at the end, it will surely assert."

[38] On the domain of virtue see, for example, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:433–34; and part II of *The Metaphysics of Morals*. And on the domain of justice or right, see *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*,

ensures that people interact according to law, it should be recognized as rightful, especially when those interactions are consistent with others' freedoms.[39] At least in principle, then, dirtiness is avoidable even here, since rightful action *just is* that which is limited strictly when it cannot be reconciled with the free choices of others.[40] The public domain is thus also a unity, albeit one that remains distinct from the private one which, given the absence of coercion, is not only unified but also perfect. Indeed, it's possible to keep our hands clean even within Kant's state of nature, the pre-state realm of "private right," since people can always choose to get along within it simply by being "well disposed and law-abiding." That said, the lack of a public legal authority means that this is, at best, a domain "*devoid of justice*,"[41] which is why we all have a duty not only to leave it and enter civil society but also, if necessary, to coerce others to do so.[42] And since this is a possibility, at least in principle – just as the public domain can, in principle, be reconciled with the private, for "there is *objectively* (in theory) no conflict at all between morals and politics"[43] – we may conclude that, for Kant, the practical dimension as a whole constitutes a unity. Hence its cleanliness. To me, however, this is precisely what would make it aesthetic rather than practical. But, as indicated, I'll have more to say about this sort of thing below.

Contemporary deontologists tend either to follow Kant in offering a unified vision of morality and politics, or to go no further than formulating a political theory while remaining relatively silent

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6:95–96; part I of *The Metaphysics of Morals*; and "On the common saying: That may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice," 8:290, the latter three in *Practical Philosophy*.

[39] See *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:98; and *Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:230–31, 237.

[40] Thus can Jean-François Lyotard say that "both practical reason [morality] and political reason are still beholden, in Kant, to metaphysics, because of this idea of totality," i.e. because of Kant's belief in the possibility of unifying all reality. Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), pp. 87–88.

[41] *Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:312.

[42] Helen Varden, however, raises the case of those heroic individuals who joined the resistance to the Nazis during the (not at all hypothetical!) state of nature that was WWII. She argues that Kant would see them as having "killed and injured other human beings because rightful coercion, as enabled by a public authority and public courts, was impossible. [So though] they were forced into their situation by the Nazis themselves – it was the Nazis' fault – their violent response is still coming at a moral, in the sense of normative, cost. As embodied human beings, therefore, we can be forced into situations from which there are no morally unproblematic exits." Varden, "Kant and Lying to the Murderer at the Door…One more time: Kant's Legal Philosophy and Lies to Murderers and Nazis," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 41, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 403–21, p. 418. But surely, instead of saying that the members of the resistance felt forced, a Kantian would describe them as having *chosen* to be heroes in the sense that their actions were supererogatory, beyond duty. So they could have avoided dirtying their hands simply by shirking heroism. On the greatness of those who, by contrast, fully face up to the *inescapable* need to dirty their hands, see Ariel Merav, "Tragic Conflict and Greatness of Character," *Philosophy and Literature* 26, no. 2 (Oct. 2002): 260–72.

[43] Kant, "Towards Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Project," 8:379, in *Practical Philosophy*.

about morals. Ronald Dworkin, whose ideas I'll discuss near the end of this chapter, does the first, and John Rawls the second; indeed, Rawls offers us his "political" liberalism as a free-standing module interlocked with, but detachable from, the various "comprehensive" moral and metaphysical conceptions present within society. All this nevertheless makes for yet another way of rejecting the problem of dirty hands. While Rawls is open to the possibility that morality may be plural rather than unified, when it comes to politics he thinks we can formulate a "reasonable" conception of justice, by which he means, among other things, a unified theory of it. In fact, Rawls' preferred interpretation of political liberalism turns out to be none other than the very same theory he advanced before his "political not metaphysical" turn; it's still the one that he calls "justice as fairness" and it is (supposedly) unified not because it consists of a single principle or master value, as with Kant's autonomy or the utilitarian's utility, but because its two principles are systematically interlocked. They are ranked serially, since the first must be wholly fulfilled before one even considers meeting the second: "A serial ordering avoids, then, having to balance principles at all; those earlier in the ordering have an absolute weight, so to speak, with respect to later ones, and hold without exception." Balancing, hence compromising, are permissible when it comes to the value or values affirmed by a single principle, however, as with the various rights which protect the individual liberty that is the basis of the first principle. But since the aim here is to do no more than "give the best total system of liberty" overall, this liberty being restricted "only for the sake of liberty itself," those meeting this principle should not be said to have dirtied their hands. After all, they're doing no more than conceding something in return for a larger amount of the same thing. Moreover, our hands can supposedly be kept clean even when we must fulfil the theory in non-ideal circumstances, which is to say when its prescriptions are not being generally complied with (thus crime, war, and the struggle with profound social or economic burdens are matters for what Rawls calls "non-ideal theory"). For the ideal theory can still be said to provide us with "a reasonably clear picture of what is just" and so of what we should be striving for in such cases.[44]

One way of getting that picture into focus is to engage in an interpretive process whereby we move back and forth between our considered convictions about what justice requires in given situations, on the one hand, and abstract systematic principles, on the other – adjusting both until we achieve a degree of "reflective equilibrium" between them. Those considered convictions

[44] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, rev. ed.), pp. xi, 203, 178, 179, 216.

originate in our comprehensive conceptions, but when we've worked our way towards the equilibrium we should have arrived at a political doctrine that, as pointed out, is supposed to be detachable from them. Note Rawls' assumption that even the comprehensive conceptions already constitute unities, since each "covers the major religious, philosophical, and moral aspects of human life in a more or less consistent and coherent manner. It organizes and characterizes recognized values so that they are compatible with one another and express an intelligible view of the world." No surprise, then, that the detached parts relevant to politics can themselves be interlocked with those taken from other reasonable comprehensive doctrines and so serve as the basis of a unified "overlapping consensus." All this means that Rawls' "reasonable pluralism" is pluralist strictly in the numerical sense; hiburologically, it's monist. This is so even if we fail to achieve complete reflective equilibrium, since that equates not with mere unity but with perfection (which, incidentally, is why we can expect never to get there: "Reflective equilibrium…is a point at infinity we can never reach, though we may get closer to it in the sense that through discussion, our ideals, principles, and judgments seem more reasonable to us and we regard them as better founded than they were before").[45] Regardless, it's thanks to the unity of a reasonable conception of justice, which supposedly *is* achievable, that we never have to dirty our hands.

And that is it for the orthodox monists, both the Heracliteans and the theorists. I can't help but accuse them of utopianism, since I conceive of the practical world as, at present, not even unifiable much less perfectible. This charge cannot be laid against the unorthodox monists, however. They at least agree that reality as a whole is not (yet) unified; what makes them still monist is their belief that there is nothing, in principle, preventing it from becoming so. Once again, we can identify two groups: there are those who are less sanguine about theory, and there are those who are less sanguine about the world onto which theory is to be applied.

Plato leads the former. As I read him, he limits any flaws to our illusory thinking about or misperceptions of the world, since the world itself is perfect. Indeed, to the followers of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, Plato inaugurated that class of philosophers for whom the completely perfect being came first and created the world after him, in contrast to those for whom the perfect must emerge gradually from the less-than-perfect.[46] In fact, however, Plato never did, nor would he,

[45] Ibid., p. 18; Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, exp. ed.), pp. 59, 133–72, 24 n. 27, 385.

[46] See Jacobi, *Von den göttlichen Dingen und ihrer Offenbarung* (1811), in *Schriften zum Streit über die göttlichen*

claim that the Demiurge was perfect, since Platonic perfection implies finitude, completion, and why would a being that was complete do anything? Regardless, it is clear that, for Plato, philosophers can at best "adduce probabilities," since "we are not able to give notions which are altogether and in every respect exact and consistent with one another"; even Socrates' words are "only an echo" of reality.[47] So the flaw of inexactness ensures imperfection at the level of theory, and the deeper flaw of inconsistency ensures even more imperfection because of disunity.[48] Presumably, it is the two, together, that are responsible for the apparent tension within the figure of the philosopher-king: his theoretical desire to contemplate the unity of universal truth seems to be irreconcilable with the prudence, the sensitivity to the particular needs of the many, that ruling well requires. Socrates himself goes so far as to admit that there is something "very paradoxical" about combining "these two distinct sets of qualities,"[49] and we may assume this to be so of any being that has a soul which delights in learning, on the one hand, yet is trapped in a body that's pleasured by other things, above all sex, on the other. No wonder philosophy is said to be a training for death.[50]

In any case, there are bound to be dirty hands among the living. One source of them lies in these seemingly irreconcilable demands of philosophizing well and ruling well. Another arises strictly from ruling – not because it occasionally requires lying, since such lies can be "noble" (*Rep.* 414B–C) and so presumably clean – but because the limitations of our reasoning ability means that there are bound to be times when we will fail to solve a moral dilemma. Take the conflict between respecting human life and loyalty to one's parent that is addressed in the *Euthyphro*. Socrates evidently believes that this is ultimately not really a conflict, since there must

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Dinge und ihre Offenbarung: Werke, vol. 3, ed. Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Meiner, 2000), p. 94.

[47] *Timaeus*, in *The Dialogues of Plato: Volume III*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (London: Sphere Books, 1970), 29C; *Phaedo*, in *The Dialogues of Plato: Volume I*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (London: Sphere Books, 1970), 61D.

[48] Nussbaum is thus mistaken to think that, for Plato, the "standpoint of perfection, which purports to survey all lives neutrally and coolly from a viewpoint outside of any particular life," is anything more than an aspiration. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, p. 291.

[49] *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: HarperCollins, 1991, 2nd ed.), 437E, 485A.

[50] See *Rep.* 485D–E, 558D–559C; and *Phd.* 63E–68C, 81B–84B. Since death is the moment of the soul's liberation from the body, one is led to wonder: if philosophy is a training for death, then it's more like practicing a prison break than actually carrying one out; why, then, shouldn't we go ahead and break out, that is, commit suicide? The answer is that we are, supposedly, the property of the gods: "And if one of your own chattels, an ox or an ass, for example, took the liberty of putting itself out of the way when you had given no intimation of your wish that it should die, would you not be angry with it, and would you not punish it if you could?" *Phd.* 62C.

exist an action that both does justice to the fact that someone allowed another to die of lack of proper care and attention, and upholds a son's obligation to not file manslaughter charges against his father (3E–4D, 15D). Yet Socrates also clearly wishes Euthyphro to conclude that he should be far from certain about what to do. Dirty hands, in consequence, seem inevitable – not, again, because reality makes it so, but because of our inability fully to grasp that reality.

The second group of unorthodox monists has appeared only relatively recently. It arose partly from its members' need to defend unity in the face of what they consider credible attacks on it associated with contemporary value pluralism. Unlike Plato, these thinkers acknowledge problems in the world of practice rather than of theory and, in consequence, they see our ultimate challenge as that of transforming the former so that it conforms to the latter. To them, dirty hands are sometimes inescapable because, while the complete reform of the world of practice is possible in principle, in practice there are times when we just cannot manage it. Indeed, to Martha Nussbaum we will likely never be able to overcome all of the relevant hurdles, while Charles Taylor holds out hope that, one day, we shall do so.

Nussbaum comes to her pessimistic monism out of a belief that the obstacles to "the good role for theory" are so entrenched that "we probably cannot ever get rid of them." Once, Nussbaum was, or at least appeared to be, even more skeptical about theory, as when she praised Aristotle because he, instead of following Plato, "returns" to the atheoretical tradition of the tragedians (albeit in a philosophical rather than literary form). Aristotle, she wrote, provides us with "no elaborated *theory* of deliberation, no systematic account of good deliberative procedure" (which makes one wonder about her claim, in the preface to the second edition of *The Fragility of Goodness*, to be "astounded" that some read it as a work of anti-theory). Later, however, Nussbaum portrays Aristotle as an unorthodox theorist like herself, someone for whom, while our values can indeed be incorporated within a theory (for they are "in principle compatible," that is, not "intrinsically in conflict with one another"), we must still face the challenge arising from the fact that "we don't live in an innocent world of orderly ethical practice." Hence the need to strive for the "envisaging and constructing of a world that is at least a bit better than the one we currently know," by which Nussbaum means a world that will have less conflict in it because greater conformity to (just) theory. Nussbaum's new position, then, appears to be based not on a return to

the tragedians but on a dialectical synthesis of their pluralism with its antithesis, the orthodox theoretical monism that she finds defended in Plato's middle dialogues.[51]

Leo Strauss is also someone for whom the complete unification of the world through theory is possible but nevertheless probably beyond our grasp. Yet it would be wrong to conflate his approach with Nussbaum's, since the unorthodox theory that he favours is Platonist. True, he not only "*really* believe[s]…that the perfect political order, as Plato and Aristotle have sketched it, *is* the perfect political order," that "the perfect society is possible," but he also locates one of the obstacles to it in practical, as distinct from theoretical, reality: "while the best regime is possible, its actualization is by no means necessary. Its actualization is very difficult, hence improbable, even extremely improbable. For man does not control the conditions under which it could become actual. Its actualization depends on chance."[52] So far so Nussbaum. Unlike her, however, Strauss also invokes the limitations of theory. While philosophy strives for "*the* true and final account of the whole," for "the unity that is revealed in the manifest articulation of the completed whole," it is not only "not self-evident that every problem can be solved" but we must also accept "the unfinishable character of the quest for adequate articulation of the whole." For "the intention in trying to understand life is to see the reason or causes of what happens, to discover the pattern, but the order does not explain everything, for there are always loose ends which cannot be understood in terms of any pattern." That's why "wisdom is inaccessible to man," and so why the philosopher "is not simply wise"; rather, he or she can be no more than *a lover* of wisdom. (Which leads one to wonder: Does this mean sophists are wisdom incarnate?)[53]

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[51] Nussbaum, "Why Practice Needs Ethical Theory: Particularism, Principle and Bad Behavior," in Brad Hooker and Margaret Olivia Little, ed., *Moral Particularism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 254; *The Fragility of Goodness*, pp. 310, 312, xxvii; "Why Practice Needs Ethical Theory," pp. 245, 254, 245; and "Bernard Williams: Tragedies, Hope, Justice," in Daniel Callcut, ed., *Reading Bernard Williams* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 215. Incidentally, Nussbaum reconceives not only Aristotle but also Kant: in her book his theory is an orthodox one (see esp. pp. 31–32, 49, 163, 329–30, 361) whereas in "Why Practice Needs Ethical Theory" it's unorthodox (see esp. pp. 244, 250 n. 52).

[52] Strauss, 15 August 1946 letter to Karl Löwith, in Löwith and Strauss, "Correspondence Concerning Modernity," trans. Susanne Klein and George Elliot Tucker, *Independent Journal of Philosophy* 4 (1983): 105–19, p. 107; "Jerusalem and Athens," in *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Lectures in Modern Jewish Thought*, ed. Kenneth Hart Green (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), p. 403; *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 139.

[53] Strauss, "Reason and Revelation (1948)," in Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 144; *Natural Right and History*, p. 123; "Why We Remain Jews," in *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity*, p. 317; *Natural Right and History*, p. 125; *On Plato's Symposium*, ed. Seth Bernadete (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 116; "What Is Liberal Education?" in *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays by Leo Strauss*, ed. Hilail Gildin (Detroit: Wayne State University

This is Plato rather than Aristotle, since the latter accepts a degree of inscrutability only as regards the practical sciences. They are the ones whose truths "hold good usually [but not universally]" and which may be no more than traced "roughly and in outline."[54] Even so, Aristotle doesn't consider these to be irremediable defects, since he assumes that every practical problem can be solved, at least in principle. Whenever a universal law turns out to be in error, those directly involved can always correct for it in that case (*Eth. Nic.* 1137b11ff.), just as, presumably, the character flaw present in the person who fails to solve a moral dilemma and so commits a tragic error (*hamartia*) did not *have* to be there. Any miscarriage, then, is indicative of no more than an unfortunate intellectual mistake, not of an inherently bad actor who commits necessarily dirty acts (*Rhet.* 1374b6ff.; *Poet.* 1453a8–9, 15–16).[55]

Returning to unorthodox monism, although Charles Taylor is acutely sensitive to how the dirty hands that would come from failing to overcome "the dilemma of mutilation," as he calls our overall predicament, represent "in a sense our greatest spiritual challenge," he is ultimately more optimistic than both Nussbaum and Strauss. And he is even though he's willing not only to acknowledge the fullest possible range of conflicting goods, but also to conceive of some of them as "hypergoods." This is the name he gives to our most fundamental goods, the ones that constitute our moral frameworks. However, hypergoods can also call for the supersession of certain other goods outright, "as the principle of equal respect has been doing to the goods and virtues connected with traditional family life, as Judaism and Christianity did to the cults of pagan religions, and as the author of the *Republic* did to the goods and virtues of agonistic citizen life." It's because these conflicts have the power to cut so deep that we "have to search for a way in which our strongest aspirations towards hypergoods do not exact a price of self-mutilation." And as Taylor states categorically (and monistically) regarding that search: "I believe that such a reconciliation is possible."[56]

Press, 1989), p. 316.

[54] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1999, 2nd ed.), 1094b21–22.

[55] For more from Aristotle on the limits of practical science, see *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094b11–27, 1098a26–1098b4, 1103b34–1104a10, as well as *Metaphysics* VI.1–2; and, regarding how these limits arise from his ethics' distinct but necessarily metaphysical basis, see Deborah Achtenberg, *Cognition of Value in Aristotle's Ethics: Promise of Enrichment, Threat of Destruction* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), ch. 3.

[56] *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 521, 106–7; see also *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 319. For a critique of Taylor on hypergoods, see my "What's Wrong with Hypergoods," in *Patriotic Elaborations: Essays in Practical Philosophy* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009); and as regards his monism, see my "A Religious

Pluralism

At the opposite extreme to the various monisms is, of course, pluralism. Pluralists assume that there is no unity, even just to hope for, whether in this world or any to come. As Berlin has declared: "the old perennial belief in the possibility of realising ultimate harmony is a fallacy."[57] Moreover, since existence is and always will be disunified, unified practical theories also have no place. Pluralists nevertheless differ in terms of how fragmented, or potentially fragmented, they take the practical world to be, and they do regarding both scope and depth.

With respect to scope, the question can be framed in terms of the degree of granularity. Some, such as Carl Schmitt, arrive at a fundamental distinction between "friend and enemy" by virtue of a cultural pluralism: "Because the world of objective spirit is a pluralistic world: pluralism of races and peoples, of religions and cultures, of languages and legal systems."[58] Others, value pluralists such as Weber, Berlin, Bernard Williams, Stuart Hampshire, and John Gray, believe that not only cultures and groups but also individuals and the parts of individuals (that is, their values) may be separated out.

As for depth, the issue comes down to how different the various fragments are. To some, they are so different they can barely even collide – and when there's "no discord and no unity," to borrow a line from Karl Kraus, then there's no need to worry about dirtying one's hands. Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly, for example, advocate a surprisingly irenic Homeric polytheism according to which we should be open to responding to each god as it comes, one at a time; in so doing, we make possible the enjoyment of highly aesthetic, because sublime, "shiny" moments in our lives. Other pluralists are not so peaceable, however; when there's conflict they assume that there must be struggle, since whenever separate entities bang together there can be no escape from the zero-sum.[59]

Age?" (forthcoming).

[57] Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013, 2nd ed.), p. 17.

[58] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007 [1932], exp. ed.), p. 26; and Schmitt, "State Ethics and the Pluralist State," trans. Belinda Cooper, in Arthur Jacobson and Bernhard Schlink, eds., *Weimar: A Jurisprudence of Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 308.

[59] Kraus, "Heine and the Consequences (1910)," in *The Kraus Project: Essays by Karl Kraus*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Franzen (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), p. 17; and for Dreyfus and Kelly, see their *All Things Shining: Reading the Western Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

The question then becomes: How to respond to the antagonism? Those closer to Dreyfus and Kelly are decisionists: to Weber, Schmitt, and Gray, the gaps between the entities in conflict are just too large for there to be rational comparison; incommensurability, in other words, implies incomparability. This leads Schmitt, for one, to ask: "Wherefrom is the [strictly de facto] unity to come in this state of affairs?" and his answer is an authoritarian state, the only one capable of imposing a "strictly dogmatic elaboration of law," as Augustin Simard aptly describes it.[60] Weber and Gray, for their parts, are much more comfortable with the degree of order supplied by reaching accommodations through compromise.[61] This is true of Berlin and Williams as well, though to them practical reason, understood as a highly contextual, not-fully-articulable sense rather than as something algorithmic, can help guide the negotiations that bring us there. When values conflict, it is possible to rely upon a shared background, "the general pattern of life in which we believe,"[62] in order to bridge the gaps between incommensurables. In consequence, the idea that "reason has nothing to say (i.e. there is nothing reasonable to be said) about which should prevail over the other" is "obviously false."[63] Hampshire would agree, which is why he too has emphasized the role that "adversarial reasoning" can play in conflict resolution.[64]

Still, whether rational or not, all of these accommodations will be to some degree dirty. For regardless of where one can be found on the spectrum of positions between the need to "impose upon" or "make concessions to" an enemy, compromising either a value or a whole way of life necessarily entails some degree of immorality – and it does even though the action in question may be the right one overall. The same is true of those cases in which a value or principle has come into conflict only with itself, since its manifestation in a given context will always be unique and trading it off for more of the "same" value or principle elsewhere will always entail real loss. Indeed, to these pluralists, it is the real threat of conflict leading to dirtiness, in the worst cases

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[60] Schmitt, "The Way to the Total State (1931)," in *Four Articles: 1931–1938*, ed. and trans. Simona Draghici (Washington, DC: Plutarch Press, 1999), p. 15; Simard, *La loi désarmé: Carl Schmitt et la controverse légalité/légimitié sous la république de Weimar* (Quebec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2009), p. 74 (my translation).

[61] See Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber*; and Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism* (New York: The New Press, 2000), esp. chs. 1–2, 4.

[62] Berlin, "Introduction," in *Liberty: Incorporating* Four Essays on Liberty, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 47; see also p. 42; and "The Pursuit of the Ideal," p. 18.

[63] Berlin and Williams, "Pluralism and Liberalism: A Reply," *Political Studies* 41, no. 2 (June 1994): 306–309, p. 307.

[64] See Hampshire, *Justice Is Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), ch. 3.

tragically so, that ensures politics' practical rather than aesthetic nature. Those who deny this are consequently considered to be "opponents of the political," since, ultimately, what they want is "tantamount to the establishment of a world of entertainment, a world of amusement, a world without seriousness."[65]

Pluramonism

Pluralists conceive of dirty hands as the inevitable result of values conflicting outside of a unity. By contrast, pluramonists such as Michael Ignatieff, Judith N. Shklar, and Michael Walzer see the problem as not merely contradictory, but paradoxical. Ignatieff, raising the question of "whether emergency derogations of rights preserve or endanger the rule of law," answers that such "exceptions do not destroy the rule but save it." Shklar claims both that "human institutions survive because most of us can live quite comfortably with wholly contradictory beliefs" and that we can face a "difficult choice among a variety of equally valid obligations." And Walzer, writing of "the moral politician," tells us that "it is by his dirty hands that we know him."[66] Pluramonists come to formulations such as these because they believe in not only unified theory, on the one hand, but also the plurality of exceptions, on the other.

Thus does Ignatieff insist upon both an avowal of the African proverb that "all truth is good" as well as the question "but is all truth good to say?" And when we turn to his realist novel, *Charlie Johnson in the Flames*, we find that while it recounts a quest for unity in the form of "a certain truth" about an evil act, the quest concludes with a character stating simply that "there are people" who commit such acts (plural) and "why they do it is not an interesting question." As the ostensibly omniscient narrator declares on the book's final page, "infamy is mysterious," which suggests that behind such acts we will find not reasons but gaps in reason. Similarly, in *The Rights Revolution*, Ignatieff portrays rights as based upon a theory that provides a unified foundation for liberal

[65] Strauss, "Notes on Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*," trans. J. Harvey Lomax, in Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 116. Strauss is able (or is he?) to avoid being a target of this criticism himself because of the highly pessimistic nature of his (in any case unorthodox) monism. Regardless, he writes in the knowledge that Schmitt's main target is neutralist liberal monism – the one, Schmitt says, whose constitution "may dissipate into mere rules of the game and its ethics into a mere ethic of fair play." Schmitt, "State Ethics and the Pluralist State," p. 311.

[66] Ignatieff, *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. viii; Shklar, *Legalism: Law, Morals, and Political Trials* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986, rev. ed.), pp. x, 73; and Walzer, "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands," p. 284.

society *and* as a conflicting plurality which requires negotiation, compromise. How to be true to both? Ignatieff's paradoxical answer is that we must strike an ongoing "balance" between them.[67]

As for Shklar, she came to defend what she calls a "liberalism of fear." It begins with the claim that "cruelty is an absolute evil" and that the "willful inflicting of physical pain on a weaker being in order to cause anguish and fear" is a fundamental infringement on liberty.[68] Liberals, Shklar thus believes, should recognize that the key division within the political world is that between the weak and the strong, and that only by protecting the former from the latter can we be said to "put cruelty first."[69]

Given that she doesn't derive this norm entirely from moral theory,[70] she recognizes that we cannot hope to uphold it consistently. So we should reject those readings of her work that portray her as a monist.[71] But nor should we go along with those who consider her a pluralist.[72] Because where pluralists assume that there exists no singular, all-embracing *summum*, Shklar's belief that cruelty is the *summum malum* is, as we've seen, central to her liberalism.[73]

Indeed, Shklar has taken note of Walzer's adoption of a similar metaphysics: she describes his work as "self-divided,"[74] most likely referencing his claim that morality sometimes requires us to override justice even though this means dirtying our hands. But Shklar seems to overlook her own pluramonism. For example, she sees nothing contradictory about, on the one hand, issuing a monistic call on individuals to "submit to a single system of law equally applicable to all," since "it is only the modern state, with its unified legal system, that provides the necessary framework

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[67] Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honour: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 7; *Charlie Johnson in the Flames: A Novel* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 157, 156, 158; and see *The Rights Revolution* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2007, 2nd ed.), esp. pp. ix, 11, 34, 125.

[68] Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear," in *Political Thought and Political Thinkers*, ed. Stanley Hoffmann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 5; and *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 8.

[69] Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear," pp. 9, 19.

[70] See ibid., p. 12.

[71] See, for example, Allyn Fives, "The Unnoticed Monism of Judith Shklar's Liberalism of Fear," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 46, no. 1 (2020): 45–63.

[72] See, for example, Shefali Misra, "Doubt and Commitment: Justice and Skepticism in Judith Shklar's Thought," *European Journal of Political Theory* 15, no. 1 (2016): 77–96, pp. 78, 80, 87.

[73] See Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear," pp. 10–11.

[74] Shklar, "The Work of Michael Walzer," in *Political Thought and Political Thinkers*, p. 379.

within which voluntary associations can form," while, on the other hand, declaring that "the enemy of any pluralism is monopoly and the domination it yields."[75]

In fact, Shklar's pluramonism was there from the start. In 1964, one of her first books tells us that it aims "to account for the difficulties which the morality of justice faces in a morally pluralistic world" – "morality of justice" is clearly monist, while "morally pluralistic world" is, of course, pluralist.[76] So when, in a later work, she argues against considering hypocrisy as the worst political vice,[77] her analysis sometimes veers into apology. This is only to be expected: while hypocrisy is deemed unnecessary by the pluralist and intolerable by the monist, to the pluramonist it will tend to appear as both unavoidable and (thankfully) tolerable.

Why has Shklar's liberalism of fear attracted such interest now, decades after her original essay's publication? One reason must surely be that people have been drawn to how her profound concern with cruelty has led her to be especially mindful about the ongoing effects of slavery in America, for instance, or about refugees, women, and other disproportionately vulnerable groups. While some have long been struck by the urgent need to right these injustices, today's increased sensitivity to suffering has meant that they have been joined by others – all of whom, together, can be expected to see political thinking that makes security a central concern as very compelling. Richard Rorty, who has endorsed Shklar's definition of liberalism, foreshadowed this development when he praised the reduction in the psychological humiliation of the weak that attends it, though he has also decried the failure to do much about the steady increase in economic insecurity that has accompanied this.[78] Others, however, have worried that too great a concern with security in whatever form may be counter-productive. One reaction to the ideas of Thomas Hobbes, for instance, has been to note that the "search for perfect security . . . defeats its own ends. Playing for safety is the most dangerous way to live."[79] Could the minimalism of Shklar's approach mean that her liberalism is ultimately less effective at meeting its own strictly mitigating ends than more ambitious forms of the ideology? I believe so.

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[75] Ibid., pp. 385, 382.

[76] Shklar, *Legalism*, p. 123.

[77] See Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, ch. 2.

[78] See Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. xv; and *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1998), pp. 79–85.

[79] A.D. Lindsay, "Introduction" to Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1950), p. xxvii.

As for Walzer, he can be found advocating a theory within which, as we might expect, all is clean. This is as true of, say, the "hard choices" that a politician must make while conforming to Walzer's theory of distributive justice as it is of the soldier who is "entitled" to kill enemy combatants under his theory of just war.[80] Yet when it comes to calls for affirmative action programs that would violate his theory's equality of opportunity, Walzer, though originally rejecting them out of a belief that the situation in the United States hasn't reached a crisis point, has come to accept them on a temporary basis.[81] And regarding war, he has always insisted that there can exist periods of "supreme emergency" when it becomes appropriate to override the rules of warfare and fight unjustly, say by bombing civilians.[82]

Note that, despite his claim to follow Walzer on this point, Rawls conceives of supreme emergencies as providing an "exemption" from the theory of just war, meaning that its prescriptions may be justifiably "set aside" and so we need not fear committing the "great evils" that are entailed by violating them.[83] To Walzer, however, this would be too clean a way of looking at it: "When rules are overridden, we do not talk or act as if they had been set aside, cancelled, or annulled. They still stand and have this much effect at least: that we know we have done something wrong even if what we have done was also the best thing to do on the whole in the circumstances."[84]

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[80] Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 55; and *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), p. 36. So when Walzer writes of "dirty work" in *Spheres of Justice*, ch. 6, he is referring strictly to a form of (clean) hard work, that is, to work that's dirty in no more than a physical sense, e.g. waste disposal. Regarding ethically dirty work, see Eyal Press, *Dirty Work: Essential Jobs and the Hidden Toll of Inequality in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021).

[81] See Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, pp. 152–54; and "Response," in David Miller and Walzer, eds., *Pluralism, Justice, and Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 283.

[82] See Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, pp. 251–68; and "Emergency Ethics," in *Arguing about War* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2004).

[83] Rawls, *The Law of Peoples: With "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 98; and "Fifty Years after Hiroshima," in *Collected Papers*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 568–69, 571.

[84] Walzer, "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands," p. 286. On p. 280, the need to override is said to arise "not merely as an occasional crisis in the career of this or that unlucky politician but systematically and frequently." This suggests dense and multiple one/many paradoxical moments, and so a view of politicians as among those who Eyal Press describes as doing society's "dirty work." See again Press, *Dirty Work*. However, when later Walzer comes to articulate "the one" in ambitious theoretical terms, i.e. his theories of distributive justice and just war, dirty hands dilemmas become much less common. This makes him both more, and less, vulnerable to Shklar's criticism of those "who like to think of 'dirty hands' as a peculiarly shaking, personal and spectacular crisis. This is a fantasy quite appropriate to the imaginary world, in which these people see themselves in full technicolor. Stark choices and great decisions are actually very rare in politics." Shklar, "Bad Characters for Good Liberals," in *Ordinary Vices*, pp. 243–

The sources of pluramonism run both deep and wide. We can identify one of them by turning to what the anthropologist Mary Douglas has written about how the Lele, a tribe living in what is today the Congo, as well as the rest of us are said to conceive of the very idea of dirt. According to Douglas, "Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment . . . to make unity of experience." All such orders inevitably fail, however – they disunify – and when they do religions sometimes respond by selecting an especially disorderly object and, rather than decrying it as yet more dirt, they elevate it by treating it as redemptive. This is the role that the pangolin, a very peculiar ant-eating mammal, plays for the Lele. While its strangeness certainly violates the order of their world, instead of identifying it as a disgusting taboo, they grant it a supremely sacred status such that, when it voluntarily wanders into the village, they kill and reverently eat it as part of a fertility ritual. "That which is rejected," writes Douglas, "is ploughed back for a renewal of life." Jesus is said to play a similar role for Christians (such as Douglas herself), and it strikes me that such things as overriding the rules of war in response to a supreme emergency does the same for Walzer.[85]

Walzer's main source for this, however, is not Christianity but Rabbinic Judaism. Think of Sam Ajzenstat's essay on the theme of dirty hands in the work of the Jewish philosopher and theologian Emil L. Fackenheim. Ajzenstat reads Fackenheim as largely losing the Rabbinic insight which conceives of dirty hands in terms of a "paradoxical equilibrium" between the "unavoidable and inexcusable" aspects of an action.[86] The idea is based on the complementary tension understood to arise from reconceiving the Hebrew Bible's supposedly unified Written Law into a series of plural and conflicting obligations. These are then said to make way for the inspired creativity behind the Talmud's Oral Law and so for a revelatory means of connecting with God, the One. Walzer's unity is that of secular theory rather than transcendent divinity, but his work nevertheless consistently affirms the very same paradoxical metaphysic of the One and the Many, together.

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[85] Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2002, new ed.), pp. 2–3, 207. I provide a critique of just war theory in general, as well as of Walzer's in particular, in the chapter below, "Taking War Seriously."

[86] Ajzenstat, "Judaism and the Tragic Vision: Emil Fackenheim on the Problem of Dirty Hands," in Sharon Portnoff, James A. Diamond, and Martin D. Yaffe, eds., *Emil L. Fackenheim: Philosopher, Theologian, Jew* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 9.

Consider his account of what it means to be an American. Walzer rejects the monist *E pluribus unum* ("From many, one") motto in favour of "many-in-one," which he insists is not a matter of "incorporating oneness and manyness in a 'new order'," since "the conflict between the one and the many is a persuasive feature of American life. Those Americans who attach great value to the oneness of citizenship and the centrality of political allegiance must seek to constrain the influence of cultural manyness; those who value the many must disparage the one." Similarly, when writing about "the tension between philosophy and democracy," Walzer declares "truth is one, but the people have many opinions; truth is eternal, but the people continually change their minds." So even though he does not "doubt that particular communities improve themselves by aspiring to realize universal truths," he concludes that the people should accept the philosopher's theory as a gift that must be interpreted before enforced, by which he means subjected to "the pluralizing tendencies of a freewheeling politics." Because "in the world of opinion, truth is indeed another opinion, and the philosopher is only another opinion-maker." Or as we might wish to put it: the one should become (one of) many, even though it's the only one that's genuinely one.[87]

All this echoes the Talmud when, regarding the numerous disputes between the relatively strict, traditionalist school of Shammai and the more accommodating school of Hillel (forerunners, respectively, of the monist Rabbi Eliezer and the pluralist Rabbi Yehoshua from Chapter 1's debate over the Oven of Akhnai), it declares: "Both these and those are the words of the living God. However, the *halakha* [law] is in accordance with the opinion of Beit Hillel." That is to say: while both schools' positions should be considered valid, in practice we follow Hillel – and we do even though, and because, Shammai's is the more true, since it is the one that captures the Torah's deeper, spiritual dimension and so is studied by angels in heaven, unlike Hillel's which is more superficial because relevant to us down here in the divided, material world. Hence Walzer's own comments on controversy and dissent among Jews: "it is important at least to notice the historical coexistence of principled singularity and practical pluralism. Revelation may be singular in character, the Bible may be a unified book (though it doesn't read that way), but human

[87] Walzer, "What Does It Mean to Be an 'American'?" in Marla Brettschneider, ed., *The Narrow Bridge: Jewish Views on Multiculturalism* (New Brunswick, NY: Rutgers University Press, 1996), pp. 269–70, 280, 272–73; and "Philosophy and Democracy (1981)," in *Thinking Politically*, pp. 5, 16, 17, 19. For an account along these lines of what it means to be a Canadian, see Robert Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity: A Canadian Strategy," in *The Lovely Treachery of Words: Essays Selected and New* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1989).

engagement with this oneness is always, necessarily, a pluralizing and differentiating process." The rabbi may not believe in God, but still.[88]

Nihilism

To the nihilist, when nothing matters there is not only nothing between which there could be a plurality of gaps, but also nothing to come into conflict in the first place. Whither dirty hands? We need, however, to distinguish between those who are nihilistic about the whole of the practical and so assume that it contains no real values, on the one hand, and those for whom only certain circumscribed practical contexts should be conceived in this way, on the other. For instance, we've seen that Shklar is a pluramonist about politics, and this makes room for the fact that, when it comes to war, she invokes General Sherman's well-known declaration that it is hell. This is why she situates it

> beyond the rules of good and evil, just and unjust. It falls in the realm of pure necessity, where the impulse to self-preservation extinguishes the very possibility of justice. It is the world of kill or be killed. In war the moral law as a set of binding rules is as silent as all other laws. *Salus populi suprema lex*, and the only remaining imperative is to end war as soon as possible, and in such a way as to avoid its recurrence. War, in this view, is not an extreme moral situation; it is wholly devoid of any moral compensation save personal courage. Even wars of survival are not just – merely inevitable.

[88] "Both these and those . . . " is from the *Talmud Bavli: Tractate Eruvin* 13b; a similar view is expressed by Rabbi Nahman bar Yitzhak as regards a different dispute: "one who fears Heaven fulfills both opinions." *Talmud Bavli: Tractate Shabbat* 61a. Moshe Simon-Shoshan has a different but still pluramonist reading: "these and those" is pluralist because it affirms more than one incompatible position, while the normative siding with the school of Hillel is monist because singular. See Simon-Shoshan, "'These and Those are the Words of the Living God, but ...': Meaning, Background, and Reception of an Early Rabbinic Teaching," *AJS Review* 45, no. 2 (Nov. 2021): 382–410. The idea of the Torah's two dimensions was advanced by the Kabbalist Rabbi Menahem Azariah de Fano, for whom "The Torah essentially speaks about the spiritual worlds and, secondarily, alludes to the physical worlds." From his "Ma'amar Hoker Din," 3:22 (my translation), in *Asarah Ma'amarot* (Jerusalem: Yismakh Lev, 1997 [1597]); see also the section "The Superior Quality of Rejected Opinions," in Chaim Miller, ed., *Rambam – The 13 Principles of Faith: Principles VIII & IX* (Brooklyn, NY: Kol Menachem, 2008, 2nd ed.), pp. 128–30. On the Heavenly Academy of the angels, see the *Talmud Bavli: Tractate Bava Metzia* 86a. Finally, the Walzer quotation is from his "Pluralism and Singularity," in Walzer, Menachem Lorberbaum, and Noam J. Zohar, eds., *The Jewish Political Tradition*, vol. 1: *Authority* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 353.

Now this is just the kind of view that leads Paul Fussell, an American historian and a veteran of World War II, to declare "thank God for the atom bomb," and Chris Hedges, a writer and former war correspondent, to claim:

> The noise, the stench, the fear, the scenes of eviscerated bodies and bloated corpses, the cries of the wounded all combine to spin those in combat into another universe. In this moral void, naïvely blessed by secular and religious institutions at home, the hypocrisy of our social conventions, our strict adherence to moral precepts, becomes stark.

In such a "world," we should have no moral qualms about doing whatever is necessary to bring it to an end and thereby erase (by violently closing, not by filling in) the massive hole in morality that it represents. When we do our hands will be neither clean nor dirty since, as nihilists have always claimed, anything goes.[89]

Between Monism and Pluralism

Ask an orthodox monist and he or she will tell you that dwelling too much on the topic of dirty hands can be corrupting, since it makes people feel as if there's no escape from the ethicist's infamous slippery slope and this can lead them to relax their ethical standards. But there is no slope, objects the nihilist; or rather there is and there isn't, interjects the pluramonist; while the pluralist will insist that ethics must take place upon it, making our central challenge that of finding politicians with the moral character that would keep them, and the rest of us, from sliding down it.[90]

For my part, I believe that there are also times when we can climb up. Practical reality, at its most fundamental, is not only between unity and plurality hiburologically, but also holist rather than atomist mereologically. The atomist conception takes the form of the assumption that we can

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[89] Shklar, "Let Us Not Be Hypocritical," in *Ordinary Vices*, p. 80; Fussell, "Thank God for the Atom Bomb," in *Thank God for the Atom Bomb: And Other Essays* (New York: Summit Books, 1988); and Hedges, "War Is Betrayal: Persistent Myths of Combat," *Boston Review*, 1 July 2012.

[90] For a monist's account of how considering the problem of dirty hands can corrupt, see Allen Wood, "Humanity As End in Itself," in Derek Parfit, *On What Matters: Volume II*, ed. Samuel Scheffler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 79–80; and for the pluralist alternative, see Williams, "Politics and Moral Character," in Stuart Hampshire, ed., *Public and Private Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

draw solid conceptual lines between its parts, as Schmitt implies when he refers to "each legal atom"; or Rawls when he invokes "primary goods" whose properties conform to a definition containing the biconditional logical connective "if and only if" and so necessary *and sufficient* conditions; or Hampshire with his idea that a value is the basis of an "absolute" moral claim, one that "contains its own sense, and explains itself."[91] In atomising or "chopping up" the things that interest them, as well as failing to distinguish between mereology and hiburology, these analytic thinkers must then face the question of whether the things can be put back together again. Rawls' answer, as already noted, is that primary goods may be interlocked within a serially ordered, unified system of principles that, he later emphasized, is itself a "freestanding" and so atomic whole. Schmitt is willing to talk about a constitutional system, though only as long as it's recognized as never fully unifiable, which is why he takes pains to emphasize that there will always be exceptions to the application of its principles. And Hampshire, along with other value pluralists, once again insists that even disunified moral systems are impossible and so that the best we can do when there's a conflict is to negotiate in good faith. For as Berlin once put it, "all efforts at conciliation…can only be achieved at some sacrifice to the critical faculty."[92]

I disagree. Because what if we avoid the chopping block in the first place and recognize that the practical forms an organic, albeit disunified, whole? Then it would makes sense, when faced with a conflict, to try and reinterpret its parts, to search within one of them for its antagonist(s) and develop ways of articulating them harmoniously, together.

Although he favours what he calls "dynamic" over "flat" conceptions of values, those that have the potential to be "complementary, drawing on one another, not in conflict," it's important not to confuse my proposal with Dworkin's approach, since he is, after all, a deontological theorist and so a monist. This is why, adopting the metaphors of monist hedgehogs and pluralist foxes that Berlin made famous, Dworkin opens his last major work, *Justice for Hedgehogs*, by announcing that it defends "a large and old philosophical thesis: the unity of value." It is what underpins his

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[91] Schmitt, *Dictatorship: From the Origin of the Modern Concept of Sovereignty to Proletarian Class Struggle*, trans. Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), p. 219; Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 350; and Hampshire, "Public and Private Morality," in Hampshire, ed., *Public and Private Morality*, p. 41. Note that, unlike most value pluralists, Hampshire came to recognize that at least some values must have relatively holistic cores, since they are partly defined in opposition to others: *Justice Is Conflict*, pp. 34–35

[92] See Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, pp. 10, 12, etc.; Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005 [1922]), p. 13; Hampshire, *Justice Is Conflict*, ch. 3; and Berlin, Review of Ernst Cassirer's *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, *English Historical Review* 68, no. 269 (Oct. 1953): 617–19, p. 617.

belief that, at least in principle, there's always a clean, right answer to any value opposition, since it is never the case that "doing the right thing…all things considered, mean[s] nevertheless doing something bad." Of course, Dworkin is aware that people often *disagree* about values, but he sees this as reflecting only their "apparent conflict"; in reality, "there are no conflicts but only mutual support." After all, the "reigning" practical principles "are too fundamental and important to compromise"; fortunately, they are "each part of a mutually supportive system," a universal and ahistorical "theoretical structure" which philosophers can bring to light. Moreover, because of this, whatever contradicts the basic rights derived from those principles is to be "trumped," and trumped cards are those which (to mix metaphors) get washed away into the discard pile. So there's no sense in which they can be said to represent a "moral remainder," that is, dirt on anyone's hands. There's still a challenge to be faced, but it amounts to no more than the perhaps endless one of perfecting the already-unified theory. For, as Dworkin states, "it is unlikely . . . that we will ever achieve a full integration of our moral, political, and ethical values that feels authentic and right. That is why responsibility is a continuing project and never a completed task."[93]

However, it seems to me that, at best, Dworkin manages to advance a mereological claim about values' holism, not the hiburological one about their unity. To him, "concepts *must* be integrated with one another. We cannot defend a conception of any of them without showing how our conception fits with and into appealing conceptions of the others. That fact provides an important part of the case for the unity of value." But to say, as he does, that "the various concepts and departments of value are interconnected and mutually supporting" is to make two claims, not one. And to define "full value holism" as "the hedgehog's faith that all true values form an interlocking network, that each of our convictions about what is good or right or beautiful plays

[93] Dworkin, "Do Values Conflict? A Hedgehog's Approach," *Arizona Law Review* 43, no. 2 (2001): 251–59, pp. 254, 259; *Justice for Hedgehogs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 1, 118, 105, 11, 2, 262, 263, 163, 473, 192–93; and see Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013, 2nd ed.). The point (a complaint) about trumped cards comes from Robin West, "Rights, Harms, and Duties: A Response to *Justice for Hedgehogs*," *Boston University Law Review* 90, no. 2 (Apr. 2010): 819–37, pp. 821, 824–25; and the expression "moral remainder" is from Bernard Williams, "Politics and Moral Character," p. 63. That there is (supposedly) no remainder echoes Kant for whom, when the grounds of obligations conflict, "practical philosophy says, not that the stronger obligation takes precedence (*fortior obligatio vincit*) but that the stronger *ground of obligation* prevails (*fortior obligandi ratio vincit*)." *Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:224. As Alan Donegan points out, this means that the losing ground no longer "holds the field," i.e. it leaves it altogether: "Consistency in Rationalist Moral Systems," *Journal of Philosophy* 81, no. 6 (June 1984): 291–309, pp. 294, 307. Or as Judge William once put it, the choice should be to "throw away the remainder – do not bother with it; you have lost nothing." Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: Part II*, eds. and trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987 [1843]), II 152 (p. 168).

some role in supporting each of our other convictions in each of those domains of value," is yet again to confuse mereology with hiburology.[94]

Consider the following. Say I wake up one morning and realize that I've two tasks to perform that day: complete an article that I've agreed to submit for publication (it is already late, no extensions are possible) and keep a promise to help a friend move to a new apartment (which is way out in Laval). It strikes me that I have roughly three options. I could drive to my friend's place right away and spend the day helping him move, though this would leave me with no time at all to finish the article. I could leave around mid-day and spend half of the available time with my friend and half with the article – neither would get their due, but then neither would be wholly neglected either. Or I could leave in the evening after working all day on the article – it would be finished but so too, I gather, would the friendship. Notice how a zero-sum dynamic seems inescapable: the more time I spend on the article, the less I have for my friend and vice versa. Simplifying somewhat, we could say that the value I place on meeting my professional obligations appears to be independent of *and* in a rivalrous relation to that of my friendship. This, at least, is how value pluralists tend to see things, and one can understand why Dworkin would be dissatisfied with the "moral compartmentalization" that it involves.[95]

However, organic holism is present whenever there's a degree to which the whole is in the parts and so every part is in every other part. And if this is true of values, then it makes sense to search within one of them for all of the others, including any with which that one happens to be in conflict. Say I call my friend to explain the situation. I might learn that he, too, cares a great deal about my professional success; after all, as he points out, he is my friend. This makes way for conceiving of the conflict in a new, nonrivalrous way – one, indeed, which may be reconcilable, synergistic rather than zero-sum. For what if it turns out that my friend *prefers* that I finish the article rather than help him move? If this is a possibility, then it must be because of the organic holism of values. However – and here's the important point – this is no more than a possibility, since we cannot assume that the values are unified, that the conflict is illusory, as it still may be the case that compromise will be unavoidable. What if I have let my friend down on numerous

[94] Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs*, pp. 7, 10, 120.

[95] Ibid., p. 105. I first presented something like this dilemmatic scenario in *From Pluralist to Patriotic Politics*, pp. 85ff. For more on the relevance of this approach for morality and politics, see also my *Shall We Dance?*; and *Patriotic Elaborations*.

previous occasions as regards similar commitments? If so, then it may very well be wrong for me to accept his offer that I stick with the paper. While my professional success may indeed be a value that is contained within our friendship, this is not enough. The friendship may still require that I help with the move rather than meet my professional obligations. So striking a dirty compromise of one or both of the values involved may continue to be the best I can hope for. For, to repeat the point in very compressed form, holism in mereology does not necessitate monism in hiburology.

Nevertheless, surely we should at least attempt a reconciliation before sullying ourselves with the compromises that attend any accommodation. And we should try to do so not only privately, when the whole in question is that of our values as individuals, but also publicly, when the whole is none other than a citizenry's common good. Note that the latter requires us to reject the so-called "realistic view of communities," the one according to which no community could ever serve as "a satisfactorily functioning whole."[96] I believe that this is what realism, properly understood, would have us do, since what could be more realistic than recognizing that people would prefer to realise, rather than compromise, their values?

So the problem is not only with monist theorists who fail to appreciate how enfeebling it can be to enshrine one's values in abstract, and so brittle, principles in order to avoid the slippery slope. Pluralists also fail to realise that, in aiming for no more than limiting the slide down that slope, they ensure that our lives will often end up dirtier than they have to be. What could be more dispiriting? I would say the same of the pluramonists, who combine both of these weaknesses in their premature appeal to irrational creativity. And that the nihilists tend to demoralize will surprise no one, not least themselves. In consequence, what we need instead of all of these and related approaches is a synergistic ambition, one that strives for reconciliatory solutions that would empower us to climb up the slope, and to keep our hands clean while we do so.

True, the disunity of the practical means that sometimes such attempts will necessarily fail. Sometimes the gaps between conflicting values just cannot be closed; sometimes reconciliation, the repair of the world, must await another day. But while there's certainly no guarantee of success, we guarantee failure if we never try.

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[96] Williams, "Pluralism, Community and Left Wittgensteinianism," in *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument*, ed. Geoffrey Hawthorn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 37.