# MORAL COMPROMISE AND PERSONAL INTEGRITY: EXPLORING THE ETHICAL ISSUES OF DECIDING TOGETHER IN ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract: In this paper I explore the topic of moral compromise in institutional settings and highlight how moral compromise may affirm, rather than undermine, personal integrity. Central to this relationship between moral compromise and integrity is a view of the self that is responsive to multiple commitments and grounded in an ethic of responsibility. I elaborate a number of virtues that are related to this notion of the self and highlight how these virtues may support the development of individuals who are responsive and reasonable in moral discourse and discerning in establishing moral limits on compromise. I look at how moral regret is closely connected to moral compromise and emphasize its significance for reinforcing personal integrity. The paper closes with a discussion of the relevance of these topics to the field of business ethics.

## *Introduction*

Moral compromise. The term almost seems to be an oxymoron. After all, how can a person of moral integrity "compromise"? And yet, at times we confront situations in our personal and organizational lives where some degree of compromise on important values may be necessary. The possibility of moral compromise occurs whenever one confronts a situation in which a contemplated choice or action puts at risk values and ethical principles with which an individual closely identifies. In contrast to the type of inner, personal quandary that may occur when one's moral beliefs may clash, e.g., deciding whether to put an elderly parent in a nursing home, the focus of this paper is more interpersonal in nature. Following Winslow and Winslow (1991, p. 313), I am concerned with compromise

> when people have resolved in their own minds what course best fits their considered moral judgments, but who then find themselves in conflict with others whose best moral judgments have led them to an opposing position.

This orientation to moral compromise is of particular relevance within institutional settings, where individuals may jointly confront important ethical issues within collective bodies such as governing boards of directors, legislatures and public policy councils, or hospital ethics committees and bioethical commissions. When

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such groups are compelled to collectively confront important issues and "decide together " (Moreno 1995) what ought to be done, moral conflict may surface, arising out of divergent values and principles of individuals within the group. A health care system's board deliberations regarding a hospital closure in an inner-city area, for example, may provoke disagreements among board members regarding the importance of the hospital's moral obligations to provide health care access to inner-city residents as compared to obligations to conserve health resources that may be employed to provide services to other constituencies within the system.

Conflicts such as the board deliberations described above may evoke underlying values and principles that are rooted in cherished ethical ideals and reflect important personal, professional, and institutional commitments. A hospital's commitment to serve the poor is viewed by some as at the core of what it means to be a humane hospital. Alternatively, there are those who argue passionately for the societal justice of conserving health care resources.

In the face of this type of conflict, where values and moral principles are at stake, the possibility of a decision-making outcome that fails to fully reflect the values of all individuals becomes very real. Some form of moral compromise, in which certain individuals "refrain, at least temporarily, from acting in accord with certain values and principles"(Benjamin 1990, p. 73), might be necessary in order to arrive at and uphold a collective decision that promotes to the extent possible the realization of individuals' respective short-run and long-run commitments (Blustein 1991, Winslow and Winslow 1991).

But even if this is acknowledged, there remains the question posed above, is it possible for one to act in this manner and not violate professional and personal integrity? Is moral compromise that preserves individual integrity possible? If so, what are the conditions under which one can compromise in matters of moral import with others and preserve a sense of integrity?

The purpose of this paper is to explore these questions and attempt to reinforce the topic of moral compromise as an important topic for business ethics writers. We ought to strive for an understanding of business ethics that connects moral compromise to integrity in business. To date, this discussion of moral compromise has been confined primarily to the domains of politics (Benjamin 1990, Pennock and Chapman 1979) and health care (Benjamin and Curtis 1986, Winslow and Winslow 1991). There are topic areas that lend themselves to discussions of moral compromise, for example, decisions on plant closings and corporate downsizing or business decisions undertaken in an international context (DeGeorge 1995).

The paucity of attention to moral compromise (see Kamm 1990 for an exception) is problematic for the field of business ethics, insofar as this discipline places significant attention on examining ethical issues in organizational contexts. The social and interactional nature of moral judgment in institutional settings and the involvement of multiple stakeholders in many business decisions (Donaldson

and Preston 1995, Freeman 1984) heightens the potential for moral conflict when controversial policies and actions, such as plant closings or downsizing initiatives, are being deliberated. The more individuals in institutional settings find themselves pulled into decision-making situations in which they must reconcile their own moral judgments with others', the greater the practical and theoretical importance of addressing the topic of moral compromise (May 1996).

### *Moral Conflict and Moral Compromise*

The need to consider moral compromise is motivated by a number of conditions that increase moral conflict within institutions and society at large. First, individual self-interest and scarcity of resources (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, Kuflik 1979) may prompt moral conflict. Benjamin (1990, p. 32) notes:

> We often lack the time, money, energy, and other human and natural resources to satisfy everyone's rights or interests, let along their wants and desires. And when rights or interests conflict because of scarcity, compromise may seem to be both necessary and appropriate.

Second, incomplete understanding among individuals due either to factual uncertainty or moral complexity (Benjamin 1990, Guttman and Thompson 1996, Kuflik 1979, May 1996) may create moral disagreement as well. One or more individuals may lack the information or have the degree of certitude about the facts at hand to establish and argue for a strong moral position on an issue. For example, it may be difficult to accurately predict the impact of a plant closure on the local community and stakeholders affected by this decision.

Finally, moral complexity may increase the diversity and perceived incompatibility of potential values or principles and act to increase the likelihood of moral conflict (Gutmann and Thompson 1996). Complex issues may engage a number of morally relevant considerations and stakeholders at the same time and lead to different assessments of a particular situation. Referring to the health care board's contemplated hospital closure noted above, the commitment to serve the poor may be perceived as being in conflict with important commitments to other stakeholders.

Moral compromise, whether prompted as a response to resource scarcity, factual uncertainty, or moral complexity, may become a particularly important consideration within organizations. In corporate settings or health care institutions moral conflicts can be sharp and the need to come together on a course of action pressing. To not act under these circumstances is to risk the possibility of important values and principles not being realized at all or realized to a lesser extent than might have been possible (Blustein 1991, Kuflik 1979).

And yet, despite the pragmatic appeal of compromise, moral conflict, when it involves conflicts of principles, raises particularly difficult challenges for collaborative policy and decision making bodies. While negotiating strategies may be of some help in addressing these conflicts, the conflicts of underlying values

and ethical principles that emerge in such discussions are qualitatively different than a conflict of "nonmoral interests" that characterize many negotiating situations (Benjamin 1990). Principles and the specific commitments to which individuals are devoted are closely linked to a sense of personal and professional identity (McFall 1987) or character (Paine 1991) and hence are strenuously defended. In the absence of a consensus that resolves important moral conflicts, one might look to moral compromise as a reasonable response to resolving such conflicts.

However much these conditions would seem to heighten the importance of moral compromise, there is nevertheless a tension between moral compromise and integrity. To steadfastly uphold one's principles and values is a notion long endorsed in philosophical thought (May 1996) and in much of Western culture and literature (Hirschman 1989). This heritage of thought and writing has led to a widespread belief that to accept a judgment or decision that contradicts one's basic personal principles and beliefs is a violation of personal integrity, in the sense of violating the unity and consistency of principles that many have defined as the hallmark of personal integrity in philosophy. (See Blustein 1991, pp. 130–138 for a review of this conception of integrity in philosophy and Hirschman 1989, pp. 76–77, as it has been expressed in literature.) McFall (1987, p. 9) summarizes the essence of this philosophical and literary rendering of personal integrity:

> personal integrity requires that an agent (1) subscribe to some consistent set of principles or commitments and (2), in the face of temptation or challenge, (3) uphold these principles or commitments, (4) for what the agent takes to be the right reasons.

In light of this dominant perspective on individual integrity, it is not surprising that the topic of moral compromise has been relatively neglected in the ethics literature and when considered, has raised controversy and questions of legitimacy (Benjamin 1990). Writers have pointed out the ways in which a willingness to compromise in moral matters has been portrayed in the literature as cowardice, a "sign of moral turpitude," or a type of surrender and capitulation (Golding 1979, pp. 4–5).

Despite this history of antipathy to the topic of moral compromise, within the past twenty years a number of philosophers have begun to address the topic of moral compromise, in the broad philosophical domain (Benjamin 1990, Guttman and Thompson 1996, Hampshire 1989, May 1996, Pennock and Chapman 1979), within the field of economics (Hirschman 1989), and in the medical sector (Benjamin and Curtis 1986, Winslow and Winslow 1991). These writers adopt a different point of view on individual integrity, one that highlights the complexity and broad scope of values and principles held by individuals and the inevitability of conflicts among these values and principles. From this perspective, integrity and moral compromise are not antagonistic notions. Rather, moral compromise can be seen as a necessary component of moral life, a life that reflects the reality of the multiplicity of conflicting personal values and principles one confronts in interacting with others (Hampshire 1989).

In acknowledging the need to reach a moral compromise in deliberation with others, there is no presumption that one fully agrees with others' views, nor does moral compromise necessarily imply moral capitulation. Rather, individuals may come to recognize that in fully acknowledging the context of a situation where moral differences are present, their moral claims must be balanced against other legitimate moral claims (Haan 1983, Kuflik 1979). To accept a decision or action in this situation, although it may not fully reflect one's values or moral beliefs, may bolster integrity if the process by which the decision was rendered was one that fostered mutual understanding and respect and avoided the pitfalls of intractable conflict or inaction (Winslow and Winslow 1991).

### *Moral Compromise and the Nature of the Self*

Such a view of moral compromise is difficult to reconcile with the conception of the self that underlies traditional notions of integrity. The traditional philosophical view of the self is one of a more or less impervious core of ordered or ranked principles (May 1996, McFall 1987). To preserve moral integrity and stay true to oneself is to maintain the ordering and sanctity of one's principles—to not allow any violation or corruption of one's "core or essential self" by outside forces (May 1996, p. 12). Integrity requires that one hold fast to one's principles in the face of temptation and social pressures. Implicit in this argument is that there are principles and commitments of the self that are truly of the self.

This traditional view of the self has been challenged by a number of recent writers (Hampshire 1989; May 1996; Solomon 1992, 1994; Taylor 1989), who portray the self as constituted in significant ways by one's group memberships. This more recent view of the self reorients the notion of integrity away from a strict fidelity to personal principles to one of social responsiveness to one's community and society (May 1996), as well as one's immediate corporate context (Solomon 1992, 1994). The maintenance of integrity requires that one fulfill one's commitments to various social groups, which in a sense constitute one's self. Rather than a unified self, what is emphasized by these writers is a self that is composed of conflicting commitments and emotions, a self that evolves in response to changing conceptions of the good over time.

When the self is viewed in this manner, what emerges is not an impermeable core of commitments, but rather a web of commitments (May 1996, p. 24) that one must somehow weave together:

> On my view the self is a web of commitments. On this view, the self does not have a core of commitments that are unshakeable. The metaphor of a web conjures up the image of a group of commitments that are all interrelated, but where the form of interrelation and the strength of each part may vary over time. A communitarian conception of self and integrity can encompass a notion of strong commitment, but such commitments are not best understood on the model of an impervious core. A web is pervious to outside factors and is hence a better metaphor for the social self and its

> commitments than is the metaphor of an impervious core self composed of unshakeable commitments.

Given a self that evolves and develops over time, moral compromise can be seen as an expected feature of one's experience in a world of moral complexity:

> Our concern is for the long run and our aim is to live and to have lived a good and optimally integrated life in conjunction with others whom we regard as in some sense equals and whose commitments, values, and principles will not always be ours.
>
> As we proceed, the best means to this end will occasionally require accommodation to conduct and practices and to values and principles that conflict with our own. . . . Given a sufficiently complex characterization of the larger network of our values and principles, then, integrity—understood as wholeness as well as simple consistency and set in the context of an entire life—will occasionally require moral compromise (Benjamin 1990, pp. 73–74).

Integrity also requires a strong commitment to a reflective process in which one is mindful of how one is making critical decisions (May 1996, Paine 1991). It is this critical perspective and reflection that allows one to draw upon and integrate the diverse commitments of the self. Loss of integrity therefore does not arise from a change of beliefs or values per se, but rather as a result of unreflective change.

From this perspective of the self, one can begin to understand moral compromise as the fulfillment of an underlying ethic of responsibility (May 1996). An ethic of responsibility has a strong social orientation such that a person of moral integrity remains "true to oneself" by virtue of acknowledging and at times deferring to the commitments of others. An ethic of responsibility features a number of elements (May 1996, p. 88):

> (1) a responsiveness to those whom we could help, especially those who are in relationships with us or toward whom we have taken on a certain role;
>
> (2) a sensitivity to the peculiarities of a person's concrete circumstances and contexts;
>
> (3) a motivation to respond to another that grows out of the needs of others, especially those who depend on us;
>
> (4) a wide discretion concerning what is required to be a responsible person, rather than an emphasis on keeping an abstract commandment or rule;
>
> (5) a respect for the legitimacy of emotions as a source of moral knowledge, and especially for the feelings of guilt, shame, and remorse that are central to people's actual moral experiences;
>
> (6) a sense of what it means to be a responsible person that is tied more to who we are, and what we can do, than to what we have done.

In resolving moral conflicts an ethic of responsibility shifts the basis of resolving these conflicts away from an exchange of claims and counterclaims to one of negotiated compromise. Acting from an ethic of responsiveness where one is mindful of a web of commitments, compromise is not only an acceptable way to respond to moral conflict, but a moral response that preserves personal integrity when one confronts differing moral perspectives.

When integrity is defined in terms of a more socially responsive self, conditions that might prompt conflict become the basis for making reasonable compromises. Moral complexity, for example, can become an occasion for acknowledging the manner in which moral compromise can affirm integrity. As individuals are exposed to an array of varying perspectives and multiple values, one's own certainty about the interpretation or application of a particular principle may lessen, opening up the possibility of accepting alternative perspectives. While at times uncomfortable to individuals, the honest acknowledgement of moral perplexity among parties can give rise to the recognition that

> as thoughtful persons struggling with the limitations of the human condition and the enormous complexities involved in justifying an ethical framework, there is more that joins than divides them. And the recognition of this, in particular cases, may provide both the motivation and the groundwork for devising mutually respectful, well-grounded compromise positions that can be regarded as preserving everyone's integrity. (Winslow and Winslow 1991, p. 319)

Such a view of the self also enhances the potential for building and maintaining cooperative relationships among the parties engaged in a particular moral deliberation. There is a stronger motivation to preserve the relationships in which we are engaged, rather than disrupt or quit them entirely, when moral or ethical controversies arise. In considering the ongoing nature of relationships, prompted by this view of the self, we may recognize that the acceptance of moral compromises in the short term may increase the potential for our principles and values to be realized in a long-run sense (Benjamin 1990, Kuflik 1979).

### *Limits and Moral Compromise*

To affirm that moral compromise is in many cases commendable and justifiable is not to deny that at times it may be "reprehensible" (Benjamin 1990, Kuflik 1979). Integrity-preserving compromise must therefore admit legitimate limits to compromise. A key question, therefore, is "what represents a legitimate compromise?" In some respects it is easier to begin with what clearly constitutes illegitimate moral compromises. Benjamin (1990, p. 102) argues for rejecting "World views and ways of life that, for example, systematically cause or permit avoidable pain and suffering or that fail to respect persons as ends in themselves." Such a broad guideline would rule out moral compromises reached with groups (e.g., Nazis, racists, sexists, governments) that violate fundamental notions of human respect and equality.

Beyond these generalizations, however, it may be extremely difficult to determine what the limits to moral compromise might be in a particular context. As Blustein (1991, pp. 136–137) notes, "For persons of integrity, there are always limits to compromise, but what these limits are is not the same for all of them."

Benjamin (1990) has taken up this challenge of attempting to define some broad limits to moral compromise by articulating a number values that frame or guide the exercise of judgment in the circumstances of compromise: overall utility (including social integrity), equal respect, and personal integrity.

The principle of utility establishes that we ought to seek the greatest good for the greatest number, where the "good" can be defined as pleasure, happiness, or other ways. Here one might ask how a specific compromise is likely to affect the overall good and influence social welfare. An ethic of responsibility is consistent with utility in that it naturally leads one to be attentive to the social consequences of various alternatives.

The principle of equal respect is rooted in the Kantian categorical perspective and implies that all persons ought to be respected, equally, as ends in themselves. This principle provides some limits on moral compromise by putting in question compromises that may have been secured in an uninformed, coerced manner and providing a basis to reject practices noted above, such as Nazism, racism, or slavery.

These considerations of social utility and respect, while establishing some broad limits on moral compromise, do not provide unambiguous guidance in matters of morality. The effects of managed care on social welfare will be viewed differently depending on how various groups (e.g., physicians, nurses, health care managers, insurance company executives) perceive managed care practices as affecting the overall good of society (Morreim 1995). Whether the practice of downsizing, for example, represents a legitimate moral compromise may depend on the interpretation of principles underlying the social contract between corporations and employees (DeGeorge 1995, Donaldson and Dunfee 1994).

As a result of this ambiguity, the limits of moral compromise are also determined by considerations of personal integrity. At issue here is how a given moral compromise is perceived to affect the personal integrity of individuals. Insofar as individuals are endowed with an inalienable right to function as critically reflective moral agents, then there may be certain nonnegotiable claims that represent a limit to moral compromise. These claims essentially reflect identity-conferring commitments that represent what is most important to individuals, and so determine their moral identities and personal integrity (McFall 1987, Williams 1985). Winslow and Winslow (1991, p. 320) suggest that we are able to sense our own limits or moral boundaries when "we are so certain that a particular course of action is right or wrong that to compromise on that point would be to lose what is central to our sense of ourselves as moral agents."

### *Moral Compromise and Individual Virtues*

As moral compromise, understood from the ethic of responsiveness, begins to be viewed as consistent with and reinforcing individual integrity, it becomes possible to think about those dispositions or virtues most conducive to integrity-preserving moral compromise in business. These individual dispositions or virtues are grounded fundamentally in a conception of ethics that recognizes the fundamental importance of interpersonal discourse and dialogue to moral judgment and character (Benhabib 1989; Habermas 1990; Walker 1989, 1992). However, in a much broader sense, the core topics of this paper can be connected to what Solomon has defined as an "Aristotelian approach to business ethics" (Solomon 1994). Within this approach there is an emphasis on an enlarged sense of self that is connected closely to one's community and society, as well as one's immediate corporate context. Further, Solomon emphasizes the importance of the virtues and personal integrity in the business setting. Virtues such as loyalty and shame reflect the responsive self noted above.

From this perspective virtues are not solely properties of individual character (Solomon 1992, 1994) but rather are social properties that reinforce character and integrity through interpersonal communication and relations (Burbules 1993). Of central importance is the development of a set of interpersonal skills that "fit us to appreciate, negotiate, and fulfill our moral positions toward and with others" (Walker 1992, p. 34).

These virtues and skills are likely to reflect both the responsible and the reasonable person, a person grounded in an ethic of the responsible self. Such an individual will not hold on in an unyielding manner to unshakeable commitments, but rather will consider carefully these commitments in light of other social demands and the commitments of others.

Responsibility implies that one cultivate an orientation that is respectful of others and their values. Moral compromise is most likely when one can be assured that others respect one's seriousness and sincerity in a given moral controversy. Where mutual respect exists, it can help identify a background of agreement against which moral disagreement can be discussed and respected. Without this level of reciprocal respect, moral deliberation may break down and lead to a compromise that, if reached, is more likely to represent moral capitulation (Kuflik 1979, Winslow and Winslow 1991).

Fostering mutual respect requires that individuals draw on a self that is attuned to others and willing to assume the responsibility to work constructively with others with whom there is moral disagreement (Gutmann and Thompson 1996). This is a demanding role and requires a dimension of responsiveness and respectfulness that is rooted in one's empathy and ability to represent and fully acknowledge other points of views. This capacity to reverse perspectives and

take the other point of view further implies a willingness to listen, to understand another, and to learn to represent to oneself the views of others as they see it (Benhabib 1989, Werhane 1998).

A cardinal virtue for the possibility of moral compromise is reasonableness (Burbules 1992). One dimension of reasonableness is open-mindedness (Gutmann and Thompson 1990). Historically philosophers, social scientists, and psychologists have tended to emphasize individuality, personality, identity, and holding strong opinions as central to integrity (Hirschman 1989.) More recently, there has been a growing recognition of the moral significance of "intellectual openness, flexibility, and readiness to appreciate a new argument, perhaps even take pleasure in embracing it" (Hirschman 1989, p. 77).

To remain open-minded in the context of moral deliberation is to acknowledge the moral status of positions one may disagree with by recognizing that such positions may be based on moral principles about which people may reasonably disagree. This disposition to open-mindedness may lead individuals to reexamine their beliefs and commitments and change their minds or modify their positions, if they encounter objections that, on reflection, are accepted as valid within a given context. Crafting such a balance between maintaining the firmness of one's convictions and being prepared to change them is both psychologically and intellectually demanding (Gutmann and Thompson 1990, Paine 1991, Solomon 1992).

Reasonableness therefore depends crucially on the way in which we listen to others (Kuflik 1979, Winslow and Winslow 1991). In order to remain open-minded, as well as responsive, we must impose some degree of self-restraint in order that others may have a turn to speak and so that we may listen thoughtfully and carefully to others (Burbules 1993). Such attentiveness in moral deliberation is enhanced when individuals are able to move beyond self-preoccupation and listen closely to others (Haan 1983).

Reasonableness in the context of moral compromise also requires prudence, a certain kind of perceptiveness in moral deliberation that allows for the exercise of practical and reflective judgment when individuals confront conflicts in concerns and principles that are the hallmark of many ethical dilemmas (Solomon 1994). It is the nature of virtues, as opposed to rule following, to be selective, fitted to the circumstances and the particular persons at hand (Burbules 1993; Solomon 1992, 1994). One must "know how to engage in moral deliberation and exchange, to know when, why, and how much to give in terms of the others' claims and needs and one's own, when all involved are deserving and all have a future together" (Haan 1983, p. 325). This type of knowledge requires individuals who can bring to moral deliberation insight, imagination, and interpersonal sensitivity (Benjamin 1990, Haan 1983, Werhane 1998).

### *Moral Compromise, Regret, and Personal Integrity*

Even if we have been able to maintain our personal integrity in arriving at a moral compromise, upon reflection there may be a "residue of moral regret" (Winslow and Winslow, p. 313) for those values and principles one was not able to fully uphold or alternatives one was not able to choose. It is in the nature of making choices requiring tradeoffs of conflicting values or ethical beliefs that these situations will involve moral remainders, important moral demands, or commitments that due to moral choices remain unfulfilled, but not necessarily nullified (Gowans 1987, Walker 1989).

Insofar as one is self-reflective with respect to one's commitments, one will not take moral compromises lightly; there often will be a type of regret (Landman 1993) that comes in the aftermath of moral choice:

> persons of integrity will not evade acknowledging to themselves when have had to give up or limit or frustrate one basic commitment for the sake of another and a sense of loss or some sort of distress because of this is still appropriate. The feeling here is not merely disappointment in the wake of unfulfilled desire but has, or has something akin to, a moral dimension. (Blustein 1991, p. 135).

It will not be easy to face up to these feelings. The prevailing notion of the unified, crystallized self that dominates philosophical thought may mitigate against the acknowledgment of regret. To acknowledge regret about important commitments that have had to be compromised, even if only to oneself, may be difficult in a culture where "to acknowledge regret is tantamount to admitting fundamental and unchanging personal unworthiness" (Landman 1993, p. 179).

However, such a confrontation with what we have compromised and the moral regret we experience can be an important source of moral knowledge and moral inspiration (Landman 1993, May 1996). We may learn more about our own limits in the face of moral complexity (Winslow and Winslow 1991, p. 318):

> To face a situation in which moral values conflict is to recognize that there are complexities and uncertainties that suggest the possibility that we could be wrong—that we may be less than completely confident about our choices. This acknowledgment is nothing more (or less) than the appropriate level of humility, given human limitations.

At the same time, the recognition of what we have given up allows us to have a richer understanding of our commitments and what we care most about (Blustein 1991). In this sense, moral regret serves an important ethical function (Landman 1993), potentially affirming and strengthening these commitments and keeping us in touch with the moral costs of yielding on important values we hold (Nussbaum 1990). Rather than weakening one's moral limits, moral compromise may ensure that we are more likely to uphold these limits in the future,

reinforcing personal integrity by connecting the regretful individual "with values that are part of what make him or her humane" (Landman 1993, p. 28).

A recognition of our own moral regret as we confront our own moral compromises may serve as well to attune us to the needs of others who have accepted a moral compromise (Benjamin 1990, Nussbaum 1990):

> Accepting a moral compromise usually involves relinquishing, at least temporarily, part of one's world view and way of life. We should in negotiating compromise be sensitive to this loss by acknowledging and attempting to ameliorate it. (Benjamin 1990, p. 124)

To respond with sensitivity and compassion (Solomon 1992) in this situation is at the heart of a self that is grounded in an ethic of responsibility.

## *Conclusion*

In this paper I have tried to join others who have argued for thinking about moral compromise in a manner that recognizes the potential for moral compromise to affirm, rather than undermine, personal integrity. I have placed at the heart of this relationship between moral compromise and integrity a view of the self that is responsive to multiple commitments and grounded in an ethic of responsibility. "Self" development in this sense points to a person who grows to be responsive and reasonable in moral discourse and discerning in establishing moral limits on compromise. Finally, I have connected the sentiment of moral regret to moral compromise and have emphasized its significance for reinforcing personal integrity.

In directing greater attention to moral deliberation and moral judgment in institutional settings, business ethics writers can draw on the insights of bioethicists and other researchers who have explored ethical decision making in group settings such as hospital ethics committees (Moreno 1995), health care delivery teams (Winslow and Winslow 1991), and intensive care units (Anspach 1993).

Exploring the topic of moral compromise in the business context can be furthered through in-depth, personal discussions with individuals who have had to make difficult collaborative business decisions, whether within a board meeting, a meeting among top managers, or in deliberations with key stakeholder groups. These discussions, whether captured through detailed survey findings or through more open-ended interview formats, should yield rich insights into the types of situations (e.g. hospital closures, downsizing decisions, international plant location decisions) that prompt moral compromise and the social dynamics of moral compromise, including the experience of moral regret.

There will be obstacles to overcome in this type of study. The culture and language of business, in particular, is one that minimizes retrospective reflection and regret and instead emphasizes the "necessity" and "hardnosed practicality" of having to make difficult compromises and putting decisions behind oneself.

This is portrayed vividly in a recent book by Novak (1996) in which he recalls a friend's visit to Gary, Indiana, to reconnect with old friends, one of whom had become the owner/manager of a factory that was being forced to lay off a large number of workers.

> In his office, stony faced, the manager explained to his old friend why this was sad but necessary, the pressures he was under, the bottom line, what was happening all around the country in the machine parts business he was in. There is no alternative, he said, plunging his pudgy fist into his open hand. It's tough, but that's business. (Novak 1996, p. 3)

Had the passage ended here, what we would have seen is what has come to be expected of managers facing "tough choices." However, there was more to this particular story:

> Then, afterwards, to talk about old times, the two of them retired to a neighborhood bar. Over beers, the manager started going over the same ground, the firings. His whole mode of speech changed. He began reciting names, and telling when they had begun to work with him, who had kids in college, whose wives were sick, how uncomprehending most of them were about what they would do next. Before long, tears were coming down his face. (Novak 1996, p. 4)

Here what is revealed, in a deeply personal way, is the moral regret that can so often accompany this type of decision. Revealed as well is this owner's humanity.

In pursuing this type of inquiry into moral compromise and personal integrity we might find, as the above story illuminates, that the struggle with moral compromise provides a window into one's humanity in and out of business. Business will not develop fully as a humanity (Donaldson and Freeman 1994) unless writers and researchers in the business ethics field identify and probe those dimensions of business experience, such as moral compromise, that test and illuminate our humanity.

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