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## Political Realism and Dirty Hands: Value Pluralism, Moral Conflict, and Public Ethics

The realist complaint that contemporary political philosophy is detached from political reality is well-worn. Yet, whilst the *general* contours of the realist charge against what is termed ‘political moralism’ (Williams, 2002), ‘the ethics first’ or ‘applied ethics’ approach (Geuss, 2008; Sleat & Rossi, 2014), appear to be well understood, there exists confusion about what, exactly, is distinctive of realist thought (Galston, 2010; Horton, 2010; Sabl & Sagar, 2017). This much, Matt Sleat (2014) and Ed Hall (2015) suggest, is apparent in moralist accounts which elide realism with the ideal/non-ideal theory debate. But such confusion is also perpetuated by realists themselves who conflate realism with philosophical positions which are highly moralistic.

This paper seeks to explore a neglected manifestation of this tendency and, in so doing, to go some way toward untangling the aforementioned problems. Specifically, it draws on the underappreciated realist thought of Isaiah Berlin, Stuart Hampshire and Judith Shklar<sup>1</sup>, rehearses their critique of moralism and extends it to a position which seems far from obvious a target: the standard dirty hands (DH) thesis, mostly owed to Michael Walzer<sup>2</sup>, which a number of contemporary realists, such as Mark Philp (2007), Duncan Bell (2010), and Hans-Jörg Sigwart (2013), have appealed to in their endeavour to challenge moralism and/or tackle the insufficiently addressed question of what a more affirmative, realist public ethic might involve. In illustrating that the DH thesis is a disguised brand of moralism, I shall not merely put some flesh on the bones of Shklar’s scattered, unsystematic objections to Walzer’s thought – the *only* realist who *explicitly* criticized his DH thesis. Rather, I hope to illustrate that Berlin’s, Hampshire’s and Shklar’s neglected insights shed new light on what is peculiar to the realist critique of moralism, the conception of value pluralism which animates that critique, and on what a distinctly realist approach to public ethics and integrity might entail<sup>3</sup>. Specifically, I shall suggest that the

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<sup>1</sup>Though contemporary realists are not dismissive of these thinkers, there exists considerable discrepancy between the amount of ink spilled on Williams’s and Geuss’s thought *vis-à-vis* Shklar’s, Berlin’s and Hampshire’s.

<sup>2</sup>I focus predominantly on Walzer’s account, but the term standard DH thesis encompasses several expositions of DH (i.e. de Wijze, 1994; de Wijze and Goodwin, 2009; Stocker, 1990; Gowans, 2001). The paper builds on a suggestion that I have explored in more detail elsewhere – that, despite disagreements over the scope and *precise* characterization of DH, DH theorists take for granted Walzer’s ‘static’ conceptualisation of DH (see Tillyris, 2015). This is a controversial point, which I cannot defend in detail here, and which might well be disputed by proponents of the standard DH thesis. However, if we can accept the suggestion that the Walzerian DH thesis – by virtue of its static nature and abstract foundations – constitutes a brand of the moralism realists reject, my argument casts new light on what is peculiar to realism, and on what a more positive realist account of public ethics and of DH might entail.

<sup>3</sup>Whilst realist accounts do not converge towards a single positive alternative to moralism, they are, however, animated by a consistent rejection of moralism – the conviction that political theorising should be conceptualized in a bottom-up fashion; that, it should be sensitive to the distinctiveness and grubbiness of

discrepancy between Berlin's, Shklar's and Hampshire's thought and the standard DH thesis enables us to pursue a particular direction in which a more positive realist approach to public ethics and integrity might be developed – an approach which we might term Heraclitian realism and which follows from their idiosyncratic and innovative account of the place of conflict in human life. But I also want to issue a warning to contemporary realists: rescuing realism from illusions, to use Philp's (2012) words, requires its modern heirs to avoid the temptation of treating the standard DH thesis as a subset of realism. Whilst a detailed appraisal of critiques of realism is beyond this essay's remit, my argument does furnish these: though sympathetic to realist thought, the essay casts doubt on the internal coherence and realism of *contemporary* realist positions which uncritically invoke that thesis and inherit fragments of its moralism<sup>4</sup>.

Before proceeding any further, I should emphasise that I do not wish to suggest that the idea of DH – the tension between the dictates of individual and public morality, and, the corresponding need to practice certain moral vices for political reasons – has no purchase or place in realist thought. Rather, my argument builds on what I have termed elsewhere the dynamic account of DH (see Tillyris, 2016a, 2016b, 2017), and suggests that: i) from a realist perspective, the DH problem is perennial, far more enduring than the standard, Walzerian thesis allows, and, indeed, constitutive of public integrity; and ii) such a problem does not just constitute inescapable, systematic a feature of high-end politics, formal institutional frameworks and settings, but it also pervades the domain of 'everyday life', and directly confronts ordinary, democratic citizens.

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politics, to people's actual dispositions, desires, and sentiments, and the conflicts and idiosyncrasies of human life (Williams, 1973; 1986; 2002; Geuss, 2005; 2008; 2015; Galston, 2010; Hall, 2015; Voinea, 2016; Rossi & Sleat, 2014; Philp, 2007; Horton, 2017; Tillyris, 2016a; 2016b; 2018). This general point of convergence, which constitutes my starting point, is exactly what the DH thesis cannot appreciate, and on which the more affirmative realist approach outlined here rests.

<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that realists *consistently* uphold the DH thesis. The incoherence of such realist accounts stems from the fact that they inherit certain features from that thesis which are antithetical to the commitments they espouse – their alleged attentiveness to the messiness of politics. Further, I do not wish to argue that all realists subscribe to the DH thesis. My argument unearths the existence of a neglected divide in the scholarship of realism: between contemporary realists who invoke the Walzerian thesis and inherit fragments of its moralism (i.e. Philp and Sigwart), and thinkers identified with the realist tradition, who articulate a more realistic account of DH (i.e. Berlin, Hampshire, and Shklar; see also Bellamy, 2010; Hollis, 1982).

## Political Realism and the DH Thesis: Two Sides of the same Coin?

The tendency to view the standard DH thesis as a subset of realism is unsurprising<sup>5</sup>. Both positions seem to take issue with moralism and urge philosophers to ‘get real’. To be sure, realists advance several objections to moralism (see Rossi & Sleat, 2014; Hall, 2015; Bell, 2010; Horton, 2017), and it is not my intention to offer a comprehensive review of all of these objections here. Rather, I wish to focus on two *particular* objections which go at the heart of the question of what a realist public ethic might entail, and which are seemingly echoed by the DH thesis.

In order to flesh these objections out, I will begin by drawing on Moliere’s *The Misanthrope*. In Moliere’s play, Alceste, the main protagonist, reveals his disdain for the moral degradation of mankind: ‘There’s nothing to be seen in court or town which aggravates my spleen ... mankind has grown so base’ (1982: 20). Alceste, Shklar (1984: 194) writes, embraces some vision of ‘transformed humanity’; he imagines that ‘a better version of mankind did or will exist’ and rages at the wretched creatures by which he is surrounded. His contempt is fuelled by society’s failure to live up to his moral aspirations.

Moliere’s play, to use Shklar’s (1984: 227) words, is ‘for and about us’, democratic citizens – especially if we consider the ubiquity of racial, religious, class-based and ideological hatred; the plethora of ‘isms’ and ‘phobias’ which permeate our everyday language and which denote disassociation from, and contempt of, a particular group. It is this sort of antipathies that have received attention by *some* realists (Shklar, 1984; Hampshire, 1989; 2000; Horton, 2011). For realists, fragmentation and pluralism are ineliminable features of liberal democratic communities (Philp, 2007; Sigwart, 2012; Bell, 2010; Horton, 2010; Galston, 2010). The demand issued by contemporary philosophers that people should positively respect others and their views, revise their conceptions of the good to be ‘inclusive,’ misconstrues the realities of politics – our fragmented, pluralistic world, and our experience of pluralism and fragmentation. Pluralistic communities, in short, are characterized by diversity, difference, and conflict, and are likely to generate attitudes of mutual contempt (Shklar, 1984: 78; Hampshire, 2000: 34 – 35; Horton, 2011: 292).

But Moliere’s play is not just relevant to us because it suggests that conflict and contempt are inescapable aspects of our experience. It also poses the question of how should we – democratic citizens – coexist and interact with one another given pluralism and our experience of it. For moralists like Alceste, that question welcomes a pithy answer: ‘We should condemn ... artificial intercourse ... Let the heart speak and let our sentiments not mask themselves in silly compliments’ (Moliere, 1982: 18 – 19). A good citizen, Alceste contends, should be indistinguishable from a morally good man; unconditional truthfulness, upholding your

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<sup>5</sup> This is also fuelled by their alleged Machiavellian lineage (see Coady, 2008; Parrish, 2007; Philp, 2007). Exploring this point is beyond the remit of the essay; I challenge the affinity between the DH and Machiavelli’s thought elsewhere (see Tillyris, 2015).

principles “though the heavens fall”, is a moral *and* public virtue. Public integrity is akin to moral integrity, the innocence and moral consistency of the saint. Alceste’s moralism is ridiculed by his realist friend, Philinte, who shares Alceste’s contempt for the way individuals lead their lives but rejects his conviction that humanity can fit into a tidy scheme of morality and/or justice *and* his belief that public and moral integrity are of a piece. ‘Like you’, Philinte notes, ‘I see’ numerous ‘unhandsome deeds’. But ‘in certain cases, it would be it would be uncouth, and ... absurd to speak of the naked truth ... It’s often best to veil one’s true emotions. Wouldn’t the social fabric come undone, if we were frank with everyone?’ (Moliere, 1982: 19). Unconditional truthfulness, upholding your principles come what may, Philinte suggests, might be definitive of moral integrity and innocence, but constitute an affront to political experience and responsibility. Innocence, regardless of how morally admirable it might be, is incompatible with public integrity and is not a public virtue. It is a vice.

Hence the second realist objection to moralism I wish to highlight: ‘political morality is not the same as individual morality’ (Galston, 2010: 392; Philp, 2007: 34, 38–9, 89–94). Making sense of public ethics entails approaching politics as a practice with its own peculiar demands: ‘the appropriate standards of evaluation arise from within politics, not from an abstract moral standpoint’ (Galston, 2010: 387 – 388; see also Philp, 2007; Hampshire, 1989; Williams, 1978; 2002; Sigwart, 2012; Bell, 2010; Horton, 2017; Tillyris, 2016a; 2016b; 2017). Put simply, public virtue and integrity are incompatible with moral integrity; a virtuous public life is intertwined with the *occasional* practice of certain moral vices. The willingness to compromise and betray one’s substantive or positive aspirations and principles, to hypocritically veil one’s contempt for others who espouse different aspirations and principles are not unfortunate by-products of social interaction but necessary conditions for a modicum of order and civility: a bulwark against descent into a state of cruelty and chaos. As Shklar writes:

The democracy of everyday life ... is based on the pretence that we must speak to each other as if social standings were a matter of indifference in our views of each other. That is, of course, not true. Not all of us are even convinced that all men are entitled to a certain minimum of social respect ... But most of us act as if we really did believe it, and that is what counts. Our manners are just as artificial as those ... in Moliere’s play ... Should our public conduct really mirror our private, inner selves? ... [O]ne might well argue that liberal democracy cannot afford public sincerity. Honesties that humiliate and a stiff-neck refusal to compromise would ruin democratic civility in a society in which people have many serious differences in belief and interest (Shklar, 1984: 77 – 78; see also Hampshire, 2001; Berlin, 1990).

It is these two aforementioned commitments/objections to moralism which appear to be echoed by the standard DH thesis. First, like realism that thesis challenges the moralist proclivity to displace pluralism and conflict *and* our experience of these phenomena; it suggests that the value-monist vision of harmony permeating

Kantian and Utilitarian theories is unsatisfactorily idealistic and presents us with a psychologically impoverished self (Walzer, 1973; Philp, 2007). The DH thesis, Stephen de Wijze explains, seeks to ‘capture the existence of genuine moral conflict’, ‘the in-commensurability of cherished values’ and to provide ‘a more plausible characterization of our moral reality’ (2009: 309 – 317). It seeks to restore ‘balance in the Anglo-American philosophical tradition’, by placing our emotions ‘at the centre of moral discourse’ (de Wijze, 2005: 458). Secondly, the DH thesis does not just question ‘the coherence and harmony of the moral universe’, but also ‘the relative ease or difficulty-or impossibility-of living a moral life’ in politics (Walzer, 1973: 174). That thesis seemingly echoes the disquieting Philintean-realist suggestion that individual and public morality conflict – that public integrity is not akin to the innocence and consistency of the saint. Despite the ‘virtues of the “absolutist” position’, Walzer writes, ‘we would not want to be governed by men who consistently adopted [it]’ (1973: 162). For, public personas – specifically, professional politicians – might have to compromise their principles, and employ or tolerate immoral actions for important political reasons; they might, for instance, have to practice the moral vices of lying and cruelty to ‘measure up to the duties of ... [their] office’ (Walzer, 1973: 161; 162 – 164). Hence, Sigwart surmises, the DH thesis ‘captures the ambivalent consequences of ... [the realist] understanding of political ethics’ – that, ‘the fundamental moral paradoxes and contradictions ... of political ethics ... cannot be dissolved’ (2013: 409; 431). That thesis, Bell similarly emphasises, echoes the realist insights on ‘the [morally] complex character of political action’ (2010: 108).

Given the standard DH thesis’ emphasis on pluralism, fragmentation and conflict, its commitment to taking our emotions and moral messiness of politics seriously, it seems striking that its contemporary proponents have said *nothing* about contempt. Even more striking is that standard DH theorists ‘barely explored’ the issue of ‘democratic agency’: the question of whether the prospect of having to get DH and practice certain vices might not just directly confront politicians but also democratic citizens in their seemingly more mundane, everyday lives (Parrish, 2007: 17). This is not to say that proponents of the DH thesis are altogether oblivious to the dirty hands of democratic citizens. However, the words ‘directly’ and ‘everyday’ are highlighted here, as DH scholars have mostly approached that issue by pondering over the ethical problems pertaining to the nature of political representation and democratic politics – i.e. by considering how, in the context of representative democracies, democratic citizens might be complicit in and thereby *indirectly* tainted by their politicians’ dirt, or how democratic citizens might have to *directly* get DH by having to punish their political representatives who got their hands dirty by acting on citizens’ behalf (see Thompson, 1989; Walzer, 1973; de Wijze, 2018). What is thus missing from contemporary DH analyses, is a careful consideration of how the problem of dirty hands, the requirement to *directly* practice certain moral vices in public life, might occur outside of high-end politics, formal institutional frameworks and settings. Differently put, notwithstanding the recognition that high politics, deals and decisions, might be reserved for the few<sup>6</sup>, proponents of the standard DH thesis are yet to entertain Philinte’s disquieting recognition that the sustainment of a community characterized by pluralism,

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<sup>6</sup>Elaborating on the distinctiveness of professional politics is beyond this essay’s scope, but see Walzer (1973) and Bellamy (2010).

conflict, and contempt, might require its citizens to practice certain moral vices in their quotidian, seemingly prosaic interactions for the sake of securing and conserving certain fundamental political goods, as much as it requires their political representatives. This, however, should not surprise us.

In what follows, I shall uncover a neglected divide in the way realism and the standard DH thesis conceive of politics and of what is possible *both* in theory and practice. I will argue that the DH thesis and realism provide us with two contrasting pictures of public ethics and of public integrity. To be clear, I do *not* merely wish to suggest that the DH thesis and realism put forward two distinct but equally plausible accounts of political reality. Rather, I wish to illustrate that, that thesis is a veiled brand of the moralism realists reject. It misconceives our morally messy, fragmented landscape; as such, it also fails to grapple with our experience of such fragmentation, the complex demands of public ethics and the nature of public integrity. Unlike other DH and realist scholars (e.g. de Wijze, 1994; Stocker, 1990; Gowans, 2001; Sigwart, 2012; Coady, 2008), I am *not* primarily concerned about whether Walzer's thesis is too narrow – whether it erroneously restricts DH to professional politicians. To merely take issue with the narrowness of Walzer's thesis and to thereby seek to extend its insights to democratic citizens, is to side-line the question of whether that thesis is satisfactory in the first place – whether it is sensitive to the moral grubbiness of politics, as conceived by realists. Whilst the DH thesis is thought to capture the recognition that acting immorally, practicing certain moral vices, is an inescapable, systematic feature of public life, it fails to do so: it conceives of the need to practice the vices in 'episodic' terms, and construes the rift between individual and public morality or between moral and public integrity as an abnormality – an abnormality sustained by an innocent vision of societal harmony. Simply put, the DH thesis cannot account for the ubiquitous, diurnal and ordinary dirt of democratic citizens – our everyday compromises, and betrayals – because it misconstrues pluralism and displaces conflict. Nor, can that thesis capture the need to frequently veil our antipathies for the sake of preserving the important political goods of order and civility; for, its failure to adequately grapple with the *perpetuity* of conflict and pluralism entails that it lacks the conceptual resources to capture our antipathies in the first place. It is to the DH thesis' episodic conception of the rift between public and individual morality I first turn.

### **On the Rift between Public and Individual Morality**

In his original essay, *Political Action: The problem of Dirty Hands*, Walzer suggests that the DH problem – the rift between individual and public morality and the corresponding need to act immorally or practice certain moral vices in public life – is a 'central' feature of politics: it 'arises not merely as an occasional crisis ... but systematically and frequently' (1973: 162). These remarks are often contrasted with Walzer's more recent allusions to DH in *Just and Unjust Wars* and *Emergency Ethics*, where DH is subsumed under the heading of 'supreme emergency scenarios' and is, as argued, more restrictive in scope (Bell, 2010; Coady, 2008; 2014). Supreme emergencies, as the term suggests, are exceptionally rare; 'dirty hands', Walzer argues, 'aren't permissible (or necessary) when anything less than the ongoingness of the community is at stake' (2004: 46).

And, the ‘ongoingness of the political community’ is thought to be at stake only in extreme cases, which mostly occur amidst armed warfare<sup>7</sup>.

The claim that Walzer’s interpretation of DH has shifted casts doubt on whether there exists a canonical account of DH in the first place. Yet, *pace* Coady and Bell, I contend that, whilst the language Walzer employs in his original essay gives the impression that the need to practice certain vices in public life is neither sporadic nor rare – that the rift between individual morality/moral integrity and public morality/integrity is perpetual, insurmountable and irresolvable – the way in which he conceives of DH suggests otherwise; the supposedly revised understanding of DH as an extreme, rare scenario is consistent throughout Walzer’s work.

In his seminal essay, Walzer departs by imagining a ‘moral man’, a man of moral integrity – an *ex-ante* innocent individual who has ‘principles and a *history* of adherence to those principles’ –, who enters politics seeking ‘to do good only by doing good’ (1973: 166; 165). Yet, this *ex-ante* morally good and innocent public agent is soon confronted with a stark scenario – the prospect of having to practice the vices or compromise one’s principles. Hence the DH problem:

A particular act of government may be exactly the right thing in *utilitarian terms* and yet leave the man who does it guilty of a moral wrong. *The innocent man, afterwards, is no longer innocent*. If ... he chooses ... the "absolutist" side of ... [the] dilemma, he not only fails to do the right thing (in *utilitarian terms*), he may also fail to measure up to the duties of his office. (Walzer, 1973: 161; my emphasis).

The public persona Walzer envisions is impaled on the horns of a momentous conflict – between the demands of public morality (which are thought to be Utilitarian) and the demands of individual morality (which are thought to be Kantian)<sup>8</sup>. The ensuing loss of moral goodness and innocence, the result of one’s dirty acts, is portrayed as a traumatic experience: ‘if he is the good man I am imagining him to be’, Walzer writes, ‘he will feel guilt’ (1973: 166). ‘The issue of regret’ which is thought to accompany the exhibition of immorality, Philp explains, ‘is important’: whilst ‘what needs to be done should be done’, regret helps us to acknowledge the moral ‘costs of doing so imposes on those who decide and undertake what needs to be done’<sup>9</sup> (2007: 92 – 93). Hence the DH thesis’ commitment to taking moral conflict and our experience of it seriously: its alleged sensitivity to public agents’ ‘inwardness’ is intertwined with its acknowledgement of our fragmented,

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<sup>7</sup> This should alarm us: Walzer’s claim suggests that there exists a large chasm between ‘normal’, everyday politics and war.

<sup>8</sup> This way of casting DH is also apparent in Walzer’s more recent work: in supreme emergency scenarios, he writes, ‘a certain kind of utilitarianism re-imposes itself’ and clashes with ‘a rights normality’ (2004a: 40).

<sup>9</sup> DH theorists’ fetishism with ‘regret’ (Philp, 2007), ‘anguish’ (Walzer, 1973), ‘guilt’ (Stocker, 1990; Gowans, 2001), ‘tragic-remorse’ (de Wijze, 2005), I explain, is a symptom of their ‘episodic’ conception of conflict.



pluralistic landscape – the anti-Kantian and anti-Utilitarian recognition that the conflict between individual and public morality is not perfectly resolvable. This, however, is not the whole story:

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

The trouble here is not just that, despite Walzer's apparent recognition that 'we can get our hands dirty in private life' (1973: 174), the presumption and language of innocence and moral goodness suggest that the practice of the vices is necessary *only* within the domain of professional politics – that outside high politics, harmony between moral and public integrity are possible. Rather, the presumption and language of *ex-ante* and *ex-post* innocence and moral goodness suggest that the *default* position of Walzer's thesis, *even* when one is concerned with professional politics, is one of harmony between public and individual morality or between public and moral integrity.

Walzer's allusions to 'innocence lost', 'guilt', and 'innocence regained', popular amongst DH theorists (see de Wijze, 2005, 2012; Gowans, 2001), are familiar: they are echoed in the story of *The Fall* whereby innocence and goodness are lost through the act of eating of the forbidden fruit, mourned, and desperately sought to be recovered. A similar story, Berlin writes, is told by Plato who envisions a distant, happy past men where were 'spherical in shape but were then divided'; and, 'ever since each hemisphere' is trying 'to find its appropriate mate' and become, once again, 'rounded and perfect' (Berlin, 1990b: 21 – 23). A version of that story is also told by Marx and Lenin, who conceive of history as a drama ridden with 'terrible tribulations' and 'collisions' which nonetheless culminates into 'a happy ending': 'a conflict-free society' in which 'men are rational, cooperative, virtuous' and which marks the birth of *true* history (Berlin, 1990b: 44; see also Hampshire, 1989: 179; Williams, 1981: 72). To be sure, these stories differ greatly with one another in content. Yet, they all follow a hopeful narrative which is definitive of moralism:

Once upon a time there was a perfect state, then some enormous disaster took place ... the pristine unity is shivered, and the rest of human history is a continuous attempt to piece together fragments in order to restore serenity, so that the perfect state may be realized once again ... our lives are conceived ... as an agonized effort to piece together the broken fragments of the perfect whole with which the universe began and to which it may yet return (Berlin, 1990b: 23).

What unites these stories is a clear, surgical pattern fuelled by the conviction that conflict is a deviation from what is thought to be normal, harmonious, and perfect a state: at time0 ( $t_0$ ) there exists a perfect, harmonious state; at time1 ( $t_1$ ) this harmony is shattered; and, at time 2 ( $t_2$ ) this broken unity is restored. Or, so it is thought.

It is this pattern which shapes the standard DH thesis' conception of the rift between individual morality/moral integrity and public morality/political integrity. That thesis presupposes that at  $t_0$  moral and public integrity are in harmony; at  $t_1$ , that harmony is disrupted; the morally innocent public agent, courtesy of some deeply unfortunate event, gets DH: moral and public integrity suddenly part ways, and the agent is compelled to violate his moral principles, practice the vices, and relinquish his moral innocence; and, finally, at  $t_2$ , such harmony is re-established and the agent's moral innocence is restored – the agent's dirt is washed away via an honest public confession and certain purgative rituals, and the momentary gulf between moral and public integrity thereby closes<sup>10</sup>.

The gap in the way in which the DH thesis conceives of the rift between moral and public integrity *vis-à-vis* the realist conception of it, should be apparent. That thesis seems closer to Alceste's moralist ethos of innocence than Philinte's realist ethos of experience. Unlike the latter – which suggests that harmony between moral and public integrity is impossible in theory and in practice – the DH thesis conceives of the rift between moral and public integrity in episodic terms: it assumes that moral and political integrity are (and should be) in harmony until a single, stark episode which requires acting immorally and practicing the vices is presented to the agent. Whilst that thesis acknowledges that in certain rare, deeply unfortunate cases, public agents should *not* exhibit the moral integrity and innocence of the saint, it presupposes that moral integrity and innocence need not be irretrievably lost in politics<sup>11</sup>. Nor, is it implausible to envision some sort of harmony between individual or political morality, or between moral and public integrity: *Contra* Berlin (1980: 50) and the Philintean ethos of experience, the DH thesis presumes that it is not the case that 'one can save one's soul' and

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<sup>10</sup> Whilst the temporary gap between individual and public morality – with regard to the DH politician – closes, in Walzer's account the dirt is "transferred" to democratic citizens, who should punish the politician but cannot do so 'without getting' their 'hands dirty', and who must somehow pay the price (1973: 180). Yet, this seems to bespeak of a certain romanticism of the ideal of innocence and the tendency to ignore that dirt and conflict are perpetual, and extend to citizens' everyday interactions.

<sup>11</sup> I elaborate on the static nature of the DH thesis in the context of professional politics elsewhere (see Tillyris, 2015). As I argue, standard DH theorists' conviction that DH politicians should publically reveal their dirt to regain their innocence via cathartic punishment ignores the existence of a second-order DH dilemma: either to publically reveal one's DH to regain one's innocence, at the cost of political ostracism; or, conceal one's dirt and fulfil one's political commitment, at the cost of piling vice on top of vice. The conflict between morality and politics does not evaporate, as DH theorists assume. Indeed, Walzer's conviction that the good politician should not publically 'pretend that his hands are clean' – a prelude to the politician's punishment, and to the restoration of harmony between individual and public morality – renders his account paradoxically censorious of the vice of hypocrisy: it displaces the recognition that good politicians should pay attention to the strategic aspect of their public statements; that, they are often required to hypocritically conceal their dirt (Tillyris, 2015; 2016).

lead a life of moral integrity and innocence ‘*or* serve a state’ and lead a life of political integrity and experience; under normal conditions and, at least in theory, public integrity should *not* be that dissimilar to, or incompatible with, moral integrity, or the innocence, and consistency of the saint. In Walzer’s words: ‘we don’t want to be ruled by men who have lost their souls. A politician with dirty hands needs a soul and it is best for all of us if he has some hope of personal salvation, however that is conceived’ (1973: 177 – 178). The DH thesis, de Wijze explains, ‘explores ... how good people can be morally compromised’. It ponders how ‘good and moral persons ... engaged in realpolitik maintain their moral integrity’; ‘what happens to a politician’s moral goodness and integrity when the only way to ensure ... stability ... requires the use of immoral means’ (de Wijze, 2012: 199; 190). Walzer’s account, Sigwart writes, ‘raises the question of how to preserve moral integrity on the slippery slope of power politics’ (2013: 432).

What lurks in the background of the DH thesis, then, is account of public ethics which takes moral integrity, and innocence, as integral to or, at least, compatible with, public morality and integrity – an account which paradoxically entails that DH and the practice of the vices are (or should be) scarce, momentary anomalies, not – as realists maintain – persistent, and inherent features of political life and public integrity. As such, the DH thesis sits uneasily with the realist point that there exists an insurmountable rift between public and individual morality, each of which is characterised by their own distinct, incongruent standards of excellence and conceptions of integrity – that, the virtues of innocence, unconditional honesty, upholding one’s principles and commitments, though definitive of moral integrity, are not public virtues and are incompatible with public integrity. Notwithstanding its emphasis on intractable, irreducible moral conflict then, – its endeavour to question ‘the coherence and harmony of the moral universe’ and acknowledge the ‘impossibility of living a moral life’ in politics – the DH thesis appears to discount some deep implications of intractability and irreducibility: it misconstrues the rift between individual and public morality, and seems to constitute a variant of the Kantianism and Utilitarian vision of harmony it seeks to evade.

That the standard DH thesis conceptualises the rift between public and individual morality in ‘episodic’ terms – that it restricts DH, the necessity to practice the vices, only in certain rare, stark, and momentary episodes – is glimpsed by Shklar:

The politics of great gesture ... still appeal to those engaged intellectuals who like to think of “dirty hands” as a peculiarly shaking, personal and spectacular crisis. This is a fantasy quite appropriate in the imaginary world, in which these people see themselves in full technicolor (1984: 243).

This remark unearths an important antinomy in Shklar’s thought – the distinction between what is ‘real’ and what is ‘imagined’; between what is an accurate depiction of political reality and an abstract caricature of

public life<sup>12</sup> (Forrester, 2012). That antinomy captures a crucial symptom and further indication of the DH thesis' 'episodic' flavour: despite its alleged sensitivity to our emotions, that thesis presents us with a psychologically impoverished, abstract, and apolitical self – fragments of which also permeate Philp's and Sigwart's realist accounts. 'Where the dirty hands' theorists go wrong', is by erroneously 'believing that their "stark choices" are appropriate to the real world' of politics (Forrester, 2012: 9). Again, the point here is that the DH thesis seems oblivious to the 'uncertainty', everyday dirt democratic politics requires – the necessity and ubiquity of hypocrisy, and of quotidian compromises and betrayals (Shklar, 1984: 243). The conceptualization of the rift between individual and public morality, of the need to compromise one's principles and practice the vices, as an abnormality is inescapably accompanied by an unpalatable over-dramatization of politics and of the conflicts politics engenders. *Pace* Philp (and proponents of the DH thesis), this need not deny that decent public agents should experience such conflicts or acknowledge the moral costs associated with practicing the vices. Rather, the point here is that because of its presumed rarity, the rift between moral and public integrity is portrayed in too 'glamorous' a manner and is painted *in abstracto* of what realists perceive as the context of real politics – the everyday, grubby interactions that take place between different public agents. For, if one accepts that the practice of the vices is an essential aspect of public morality and integrity, to think of a public agent as a tormented figure, haunted by guilt, would be melodramatic, to say the least. If the practice of the vices is systematic, not abnormal, a feature of public life, it is more plausible to suggest that the dirtier the public agent's hands get, the more *blasé* towards his dirt he becomes. And, if one takes the rift between individual and public integrity seriously – the recognition moral integrity and innocence are not states or qualities which can be temporarily lost in politics but states or qualities which are incompatible with a virtuous public life *in toto* (Hampshire, 1989: 161 – 183) –, one has no reason to expect this melodrama in the first place. Indeed, as Walzer suggests, that would be the reaction of an 'imagined', morally innocent individual, not of a politically grounded, experienced agent, who takes the grubbiness of politics seriously. Experience, the *sine qua non* of public virtue, involves 'the expectation of unavoidable squalor' – the recognition one's 'usual choice will be the lesser of two or more evils' (Hampshire, 1989: 170; see also Berlin, 1981: 66).

The abstract, apolitical and sociologically detached self which lurks in the background of the DH thesis – a by-product of its 'episodic' flavour and flight from political reality – is also evident in the way in which that thesis typically frames and discusses DH scenarios: it focuses on a single, 'heroic figure' who must make an enormous sacrifice (Shklar, 1984: 243). Again, the trouble here is that the picture of this lonely, *ex-ante* innocent individual who is faced with (what is thought to be) a momentary, stark choice diverts our attention away from real politics – the relationships between *different* individuals. The heroic individual envisioned by the DH thesis and the episodic conception of the rift between individual and public morality is conceived *in abstracto* of the messy context in which real agents operate – a context ridden with antagonistic, mutually

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<sup>12</sup> That the DH thesis abstracts from political reality also emerges from Shue's (2009) critique of one the examples Walzer uses – the Ticking Bomb Scenario.

antipathetic agents who espouse different substantive or positive values and principles and who must, if they are to co-exist and co-operate in a relatively civil manner, occasionally get their hands dirty, by trimming their moral aspirations and hypocritically veiling their antipathies.

The standard DH thesis and realism thus depart from fundamentally different premises, at the core of which lie not just contrasting pictures of public morality and integrity but also radically different pictures of politics and community. It is tempting to suggest alternatively that no conception of community whatsoever is to be found in the DH thesis. This might, perhaps, explain why the notion of community hardly features in contemporary DH accounts. But whilst the public agent the DH thesis presents us with floats above the *real* political context, that agent, I contend, does operate within a particular conception of political community – one which has received little attention by DH theorists and contemporary realists: an innocent, apolitical vision of societal harmony. It is this vision which sustains DH theorists' idealistic, 'episodic' conceptualization of the rift between individual and public morality.

### **On Community, Pluralism and Conflict**

Let me begin by elaborating the moralist narrative of temporary disaster which sets the terms in which the DH thesis' episodic conception of the rift between individual and public morality is couched. That narrative puts forward an image of perfection under the aegis of unity and completeness – an *a priori* faith in the conceptual *possibility, normality* and *attractiveness* of harmony – which is traced to Plato's *Republic* and which a large strand of philosophical thought in general and the post-Rawlsian scholarship on ideal/non-ideal theory in particular has, almost unquestioningly, inherited (Berlin, 1990a; Hampshire, 1983; 1989; 2000). At the core of this narrative lies the seductive assumption of value-monism – the very assumption the DH thesis allegedly challenges but which, I will argue, collapses into. Value-monism entails that moral conflicts are pathologies – chimeras or mathematical puzzles that can and should be overcome. Monism, Berlin writes, postulates that 'all truly good things are linked to one another in a single, perfect whole; or, at the very least cannot be incompatible' and 'that the realization of the pattern formed by them is the one true end of all rational activity, both public and private' (Berlin, 1969: x). Monism, Hampshire writes, presupposes that there exists 'a common basis' behind and 'an ultimate harmony among moral claims' (1983: 118).

Note that monism does *not* just entail an image of harmony *at the level of the individual*; it does not merely entail that the demands and virtues of individual and public morality can be harmonized in a coherent, allegedly perfect whole. Rather, monism also entails an image of harmony *at the level of the polis*. It presents us with a vision of what is thought to be the perfect, ideal community: 'a society which lives in pure harmony', in which its members, despite their *apparent* differences agree on certain neat, substantive values, principles and interests and can thereby 'live in peace', 'love one another' and lead a life devoid of contempt towards one another (Berlin, 1990b: 20). As Berlin's remark suggests, it is this vision of harmony at the level of the *polis* which fortifies the vision of harmony at the level of the individual. For, in a harmonious community – a society

in which public personas agree with respect to their positive moral aspirations, principles, aspirations and interests – the necessity to compromise one’s principles or hypocritically conceal one’s disdain need not arise in the first place. Neither contempt and antagonisms nor the practice of certain vices are admitted into harmonious, and what is thought to be perfect, healthy, and normal a society (Shklar, 1965; Hampshire, 2000). Regardless of whether one’s initial focus lies on the level of the individual or of the *polis*, then, the belief in the possibility of formulating a set of shared substantive or positive values and principles – be they cast as universal principles of justice and/or morality, couched in abstract rationality, or as society-wide principles of justice and/or morality, couched in our allegedly common, communal understandings – casts away the possibility of insurmountable conflict within the *polis* – between different individuals – *and* within the individual – between moral and public integrity.

This recognition unearths where the precise problem with the DH thesis lies. Recall that Walzer casts the rift between individual and public morality as a conflict between Kantian and Utilitarian principles. That thesis does not question the overall validity and premises of such theories. It takes these *for granted*. Whilst that thesis purportedly mends some of the insights of Kantianism and Utilitarianism – by pointing to the (temporary) rift between individual and public morality – its discussion of that rift proceeds by embracing the allegedly universal, substantive principles and values propounded by these theories<sup>13</sup> (Tillyris, 2016a). As such, the DH thesis inherits what for realists constitutes a crucial problem with such theories – a problem forms an essential aspect of their abstract moralism and value-monism. For, such theories do not merely displace conflict and fragmentation *at the level of the individual* – between the dictates and virtues of individual and public morality – as the DH thesis suggests. They also displace conflict and fragmentation *at the level of the polis*: they turn a blind eye to the recognition that there exists a plurality of conflicting, incommensurable and antagonistic ways of life, each with its own distinct conception of the good and justice, its own distinct set of substantive moral principles, values and aspirations. As Hampshire writes:

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<sup>13</sup>One might object that this is an uncharitable critique of Walzer’s account. For, Walzer’s paper on DH was published in 1973 and ponders the possibility of moral conflict – a possibility which was an anathema to Kantians and Utilitarians. As such, the cost of failing to question the underlying premises of Kantianism and Utilitarianism – the vision of societal harmony and consensus on certain substantive moral principles – is, one might argue, inevitable, and given Walzer’s aims, necessary. Though I cannot address this objection in detail here, I wish to highlight two problems with it. First, pluralist critics of Kantianism and Utilitarianism – i.e. Williams, Berlin, Hampshire, and Shklar – sought to defend the idea of irresolvable moral conflict by rejecting the aforementioned philosophical traditions *altogether*, by taking deep pluralism and the perpetuity of conflict at the level of the individual *and* of the polis a lot more seriously. Secondly, the vision of societal harmony and agreement on certain substantive moral principles is, as I argue, a recurrent theme in Walzer’s thought: it underpins his conception of community in *Spheres of Justice*, *On Negative Politics*, and *Just and Unjust Wars*.

This picture of a possible harmony ... is carried through the Christian centuries and persists in the philosophy of the Enlightenment, and it persists in contemporary liberalism also. Whatever the contingent differences between us arising from our personal history – from our memories and imagination – the king in his castle and the peasant in his hovel are one, in their common humanity, in virtue of the overriding superiority of rational moral principles that king and peasant may both implicitly recognize (2000: 22).

Or, as he notes elsewhere:

Whether it is Aristotelian, Kantian, Humean, or utilitarian, ... philosophy can do harm when it implies that there ought to be, and can be, fundamental agreement on, or ... a convergence in, moral ideals – the harm is that the reality of conflict, both within individuals and within societies, is disguised by the myth of humanity as a consistent moral unit across time and space. There is a false blandness in the myth, an aversion from reality (Hampshire, 1983: 155)

By virtue of its Kantian and Utilitarian premises, Walzer's thesis can, at best, *only* account for a *plurality of conflicting values and principles*. It lacks the conceptual resources to account for *a plurality of different, conflicting and antagonistic ways of life*, each with its own substantive moral values and principles, each with its own distinct conception of such values and principles which cannot be brought into harmony nor cashed out into a single currency evaluation. Hence, it is not just that the DH thesis postulates that the conflict between individual and public morality is ephemeral, ultimately resolvable and thereby collapses into the moralist vision it allegedly challenges – the Kantian and Utilitarian image of harmony at *the level of the individual*. Rather, its 'episodic' conception of that conflict is sustained by a vision of harmony at *the level of the polis*. DH theorists' tendency to conceive of a lonely individual *in abstracto* of real, conflict-ridden political context should not thus strike us as odd. That tendency is symptomatic of a larger problem: the DH thesis' conviction that a single individual, not a plurality of individuals, inhabits the world or a political community.

This aversion from reality – the misconception of pluralism and the consequent reduction of the plural, diverse and antagonistic ways of life which compose a *polis* into a single, perfect and harmonious whole – is not just displayed by DH accounts which cast the rift between individual and public morality in Utilitarian and Kantian terms. What is at stake here is not just whether conceptualising DH as a conflict between Kantian and Utilitarian principles suffices, but, rather, whether universal or society-wide agreement on a set of substantive principles, values, and aspirations *whatever these may be* is plausible. This conviction also seems to permeate the more contemporary expositions of DH articulated by de Wijze (1994) and Stocker (1990) which inherit Walzer's' episodic conception of DH, but cast the problem as a stark, momentary, dramatic conflict between two 'impossible oughts' (see Tillyris, 2016a; 2017). That these expositions of DH *presuppose* the existence of substantive principles and values to which all agents should ascend, does not just follow from the fact that they

*subsume* and do not reject Walzer's specific formulation – that, they do not take issue with the allegedly universal, sociologically detached nature of Kantian and Utilitarian principles (Tillyris, 2016a: 165). Rather, the moralism of such accounts can be also gleaned from their uncritical reliance on the word 'ought', which frequently appears in modern philosophical discussions but which, to use Hampshire's words, constitutes 'a residue of Kant's doctrine' and the Enlightenment: its 'recognised moral use' denotes the existence of 'a universal principle' (Hampshire, 1982: 13). The blindness of modern DH expositions to the universalist connotations associated with 'ought' and the philosophical tradition of which that word is part – in addition to their tendency to build on Walzer's 'episodic' account –, suggests that they too espouse a shallow conception of pluralism: like Walzer's account, these expositions can account for one-person conflicts – a *plurality of conflicting values and principles* – but lack the conceptual resources to capture the existence of a *plurality of different, and antagonistic ways of life, each with its own distinct, incompatible conception of these values and principles*.

This misconception of pluralism and reduction of the diverse and antagonistic ways of life which compose a *polis* into a single, perfect, and harmonious whole – a misconception which descends from Walzer's account upon contemporary expositions of DH – is also apparent in Walzer's *Spheres of Justice* which is rarely discussed in conjunction with his DH account<sup>14</sup>. Walzer's *Spheres of Justice*, like his DH thesis, *appears* to echo certain realist commitments – an anti-Platonic commitment against abstraction; an attentiveness to our pluralistic, fragmented and messy moral landscape<sup>15</sup> (for a 'realist' take on *Spheres of Justice*, see Sangiovanni,

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<sup>14</sup> Note that *Spheres of Justice* is not the only work of Walzer which misconstrues pluralism and displaces conflict. In his critique of Shklar's liberalism of fear, Walzer argues that politics should not be merely seen as a bulwark against the *summum malum* – i.e. chaos, cruelty, and injustice –, but as protecting something more positive and substantive: 'when we defend the bulwarks we are usually defending something more than our lives; we are defending our way of life' (Walzer, 1996: 18). This idealistic vision of societal harmony and agreement on certain substantive principles of justice or morality, also underpins Walzer's conception of the state in *Just and Unjust Wars*. For, states, according to Walzer, constitute a formed political association, an organic social contract, and should not just ensure individual security; rather, they should also protect a *common cultural life*, made their citizens over centuries of interaction (see Walzer, 2006: 53 – 58; see also Lazar, 2013: 5380 and Luban, 1980).

<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Walzer distances himself from the Kantian and Utilitarian universalism and conception of abstract rationality permeating his DH thesis. *Contra* Plato and the Enlightenment, Walzer emphasizes that he does not seek to 'sketch a utopia located nowhere', 'a philosophical ideal applicable everywhere' or achieve 'great distance from ... [our] social world'. We should, Walzer notes, avoid giving into 'the first impulse' of philosophers since Plato, and 'search for some underlying unity' (1985: 4 – 6). Yet, notwithstanding Walzer's shift from humanity to community, the vision of harmony under the aegis of agreement on certain substantive values and principles remains: Walzer supplants universal, substantive principles grounded on abstract rationality, with society-wide substantive principles, grounded on shared communal understandings.



2008). Yet, like his DH thesis, Walzer's account of justice misconstrues pluralism, fragmentation and conflict and collapses into the moralism and monism realists reject. Whilst Walzer is clear that our *cosmos* features a plurality of goods which are interpreted differently across different times and places and which feed into a plurality of substantive principles of justice, he paradoxically suggests that *within a domestic community* – a liberal democratic community, no less – the search for common, *substantive* principles of justice is not futile; these principles can be extracted from 'our shared understandings of social goods' (Walzer, 1985: xiv). 'The political community', Walzer emphasizes, is 'the appropriate setting' for grounding such principles. For, 'it is probably the closest we can come to a world of common meanings. Language, history and culture come together ... to produce a collective consciousness' a set of 'sharing sensibilities and intuitions' (Walzer, 1985: 28). What one encounters here, is the shallow conception of pluralism which permeates the DH thesis: Walzer's emphasis on *shared understandings* of goods and substantive or positive principles, his assertion that 'mutual respect' constitutes one of the 'deep strengths' of his account (Walzer, 1985: 321), entail that his conception of community can, at best, only accommodate *a plurality of different and conflicting substantive principles of justice*. It cannot accommodate *a plurality of different, antagonistic and deeply hostile ways of life, each with its own conception of the same good and substantive principle of justice*<sup>16</sup>. This recognition also emerges from Shklar's *The Work of Michael Walzer*, in which she ponders: 'What are those "shared understandings" on which everything is based? ... [W]e may speak the same language, but that is no guarantee of sharing. ... Far from sharing a common understanding, the citizens of a modern state are culturally disparate and often deeply hostile to one another' (1998: 384 – 385). Or, as she writes in *The Faces of Injustice*:

These intimations of shared meaning ... are never checked against actual opinions ... To confuse a common culture with a harmony of political interests amounts to little but a sleight of hand. What cultures share ... is language, which makes it possible for us to express, among other things, our ... contempt for each other (1990: 115).

The "core" of Shklar's disagreement with Walzer's account in particular and 'communitarian thought' in general, Shefali Mizra explains, 'resided in its misty-eyed romanticism about the nature of community' (Mizra, 2016: 80) – her contention that 'harmonious accounts' of community fail to grapple with 'the evidence of direct experience and the irreducible conflicts of social opinion' (Shklar, 1967: 280; see also Hess, 2014). Shklar's retort to the vision of societal harmony permeating Walzer's thought thus captures an important aspect of her critique of moralism: that vision is an innocent fairy-tale. What is worth highlighting here, is that a version of this vision also persists in Philp's account which, despite its emphasis on societal conflict, postulates that a perfect, harmonious liberal state, though practically unrealisable, is conceptually plausible

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<sup>16</sup> That Walzer's account entails a moralistic, harmonious conception of community is noted by Ronald Dworkin; Walzer's vision, Dworkin observes, is 'relaxed' and 'agreeable' – it 'promises a society at peace with its own traditions, without ... tensions' ... 'Citizens live together in harmony' (1983: 1 – 2).

(Philp, 2007: 111). But, that vision, to use Berlin's words, presents us with 'a world' which is 'beyond our ken' (1990a: 13). To proceed by embracing that vision is to erroneously begin from a point external to the world we inhabit – it is to distort or bend reality into conformity with one's own creative will. 'We must', Berlin emphasizes, 'fall back on the ordinary resources of empirical observation and ordinary human knowledge'. And 'these certainly give us no warrant for supposing' that 'a harmony of true values is somewhere to be found' (1969: 168 – 169). 'When uncorrupted by [moralist] theory', Hampshire adds, we identify 'a multiplicity of [conflicting] moral claims' (1978: 42). We identify that 'different men and different social groups recognize rather different moral necessities in the *same* essential areas of moral concern' (Hampshire, 1983: 94). Our world scatters numerous differences and conflicts before us: different and competing ways of life, different and competing substantive ideals and interests, different and competing conceptions of these ideals and interests. What is at stake here is neither a matter of mere practical 'feasibility' or 'constraint' nor a question of consistency *per se*. It is not that we can begin from the premise that a harmonious society – a society united under the aegis of certain substantive principles and values – is, in theory plausible, but our circumstances are such that we cannot practically realize that society or consistently act on the basis of such principles and values [*pace* 'realists' such as Philp (2007), and ideal/non-ideal theorists such as Valentini (2012), Hamlin and Stemplowska (2012)]. Rather, the question is, in part, what should be seen as plausible *even* in theory, *even* under the most ideal circumstances. In this sense, realism is not, *pace* Philp, 'committed to bringing political theory out of the sun', by drawing our attention to 'the grubby exigencies of the political cave' (Philp, 2012: 2; 18). Rather, it suggests that to begin from the sun is to set off from the wrong premises *altogether*. For, 'no rules that we could invent would be better', Shklar emphasises, 'because we remain ... too diverse to be fit into a single normative scheme' (1990: 27). The realist critique, is, in short, partly levelled against the moralist conviction that a harmonious society is conceptually plausible in the first place – the quest to *first* formulate certain shared, substantive principles, values, aspirations (whatever these might be) and *then* merely seek to realise these in politics.

What is troublesome with the vision of societal harmony which fuels moralist projects, is that it 'ascribes psychological and intellectual qualities to us that we simply do not possess' (Shklar, 1990: 27). Otherwise put, that vision rests, either implicitly or explicitly, on a problematic, ahistorical picture of the faculty of reason, or consciousness. The idea here is that reason or consciousness has a convergent property: it enables those who possess and can exercise that capacity to converge towards and reach agreement on the common good or on certain substantive moral principles, values and aspirations. Yet, there is nowhere evidence that common sense or the exercise of reason tends naturally to converge in the way moralists presuppose (Berlin, 1980; Shklar, 1984; 1990; Hampshire, 1983; 1993b; 2000). Put differently, that the moralist vision of societal serenity is implausible is defended by appeal to a simple *motto* which reflects the realities of the political cave and which captures one of the key sources of conflict within the *polis* and of our mutual antipathies: "all determination is negation" (Hampshire, 2000: 34). Historically, Hampshire argues, groups and individuals have tended to define themselves – their traditions and substantive conceptions of morality and/or justice – in oppositional

terms: not merely in terms of *who they are* and *what they espouse* but also in terms of *who they are not* and *what they reject*:

Some forms of fundamentalism ... define themselves as a principled rejection of secular, liberal and permissive moralities ... The essence of liberal morality is the rejection of any final and exclusive authority, natural and supernatural, and of the accompanying compulsion and censorship. In this context, freedom itself is ... cherished, as a negative notion: no walls of dogma, no unquestionable rules from priests and politicians; the future is to be an open field for discovery ... The liberal's adversary is disgusted ... by this negativity, by the openness and emptiness, by the looseness of undirected living. The ensuing conflict is dark and bitter (Hampshire, 2000: 34 – 35).

This idea is also gestured by Berlin who writes: 'One chooses classical civilisation rather than the Theban desert, Rome and not Jerusalem, whatever the priests may say, because such is one's nature, and - he is no existentialist or romantic individualist *avant la parole* - because it is that of men in general, at all times, everywhere' (Berlin, 1980: 75). As long as individuals are affiliated with conflicting traditions, lead different lives and have different life stories, experiences, memories, and imaginations neither conflict nor antagonism and contempt, should be expected to evaporate in theory *and* in practice. 'Conflict is perpetual', Hampshire reminds us: 'why, then, should we be deceived?' (2000: 51).

Thus, the standard DH thesis – by virtue of its shallow conception of pluralism and conflict – does not just displace the recognition that society is a battlefield of different, antagonistic ways of life. The displacement of that recognition constitutes, in essence, the displacement of what realists perceive politics to be. The DH thesis cannot grapple with the morally messy context in which public personas operate or with what is distinctive of realist thought: that, a satisfactory account of public ethics entails approaching politics as a practice with its own demands and standards of excellence – demands and standards of excellence which emerge from *within* politics. By virtue of its moralistic, sanitized conception of community, the DH thesis is incapable of adequately entertaining how precious and precarious order, stability, and civility are, and how effortful the maintenance of a shared public space is. Nor can it account for the recognition that the burdens of maintaining such a space are also *directly* incurred by democratic citizens – the agents who inhabit it and accrue some of its benefits: a protection from a perpetual 'war of all of all against all', a life that is 'nasty, brutish and short', and the capacity to compete for, pursue and realize some of their substantive values, principles and aspirations (Hampshire, 2001; Berlin, 1990a; Shklar, 1984). Differently put, the DH thesis displaces what Williams terms the first political question – the question which constitutes the point from which Moliere's play sets off: how to secure a modicum of 'order, protection, safety, trust, and the conditions of cooperation' amidst a chaotic plurality of antagonistic ways of life (Williams, 2002: 3). That question and the Philintean-realist answer to it – that, the maintenance of a shared public space amid deep societal conflict opens an insurmountable, perpetual rift between the dictates of individual and public morality and integrity; that, sustaining a modicum of order

and civility renders the need to get DH, and the practice of certain vices systematic, enduring, and essential an aspect of public ethics and public integrity – cannot be entertained by the DH thesis<sup>17</sup>. For, these are superseded by a more morally demanding but unsatisfactorily idealistic, value-monist vision of harmony at the level of the *polis*.

### **The Distinctiveness of (Heraclitian) Realism**

In *Realism without Illusions*, Philp acknowledges that one of the risks realists face is losing their way. My discussion thus far has unearthed and explored one of the ways in which that might and often does happen. The recognition that the DH thesis constitutes a disguised version of moralism, entails that the tendency of some *contemporary* realists (Philp included) to uncritically appeal to that thesis and borrow some of its features is problematic; at best, it might sow confusion over the distinctiveness of realist thought; at worst, it casts doubt over the internal coherence and realism of their accounts.

The recognition that the DH thesis is a brand of moralism also casts doubt on the moralist proclivity to elide realism with the ideal/non-ideal theory debate. Indeed, Berlin's, Shklar's, and Hampshire's neglected insights help us to clarify and strengthen a point which is often gestured *en passant* in the literature on realism (see Geuss, 2008: 2; 21; 2005: 223; 2015) but which is insufficiently appreciated by realists who draw on the DH thesis: unlike non-ideal theories, realism does not merely question the *practicability* of the vision propounded by moralism/ideal theories; it does not just emphasize that conflict, our mutual antipathies, and the need to practice certain vices are *prima facie* perpetual features of public life – difficult, perhaps impossible, to remove in practice – but surmountable in theory. *Contra* the ideal/non-ideal theory debate, the realist charge is not methodological in nature *per se*: it is not a call for moralists to incorporate more empirical facts into their accounts and consider how these might affect the practical implementation of the normative vision they articulate. Rather, the nature of the realist charge is primarily conceptual: it entails the rejection of the very plausibility of the normative vision ideal/non-ideal theories articulate. And, it is upon the rejection of the innocent vision of societal harmony under the aegis of agreement on substantive principles (whatever these might be), that a more positive, realist vision of public ethics and DH is couched: the recognition that an adequate account of public ethics should approach politics as a distinctive practice with its own peculiar set of demands and standards of excellence – a practice which occurs amidst a chaos of conflicting, hostile ways of

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<sup>17</sup> This need not entail that citizens should *always* betray their aspirations or *unconditionally* tolerate others by masking their antipathies. Nor is this to suggest that order and security are unconditional goods. However, these 'negative' goods are of fundamental importance – securing these is a condition for pursuing other, more 'positive' goods (Berlin, 1990a; Williams, 2002; Hampshire, 2001). My aim here is not to cast an all-encompassing account of when public personas should practice the vices (a task which cannot be performed *in abstracto* of the circumstances with which a particular agent is confronted with), but to register a more modest point: the DH thesis displaces politics and public ethics.

life and which requires the capacity to often hypocritically veil one's contempt and suspend one's substantive values and principles *in action*.

What I want to emphasize though, is that realism – as apprehended by Berlin, Hampshire and Shklar – also casts doubt on the moralist, value-monist conviction that harmony – at the level of the individual (between individual and public morality) and of the *polis* (between different public agents) – is *desirable*; or, in reverse, that conflict, our mutual antipathies and the need to practice certain vices are defects or diseases in public and individual life; deviations from the normal, perfect state of affairs. This recognition lies at the core of the specific brand of realism espoused by Berlin, Hampshire and Shklar – what we might term Heraclitian realism – and marks an important divergence in the way in which the heroes of this paper conceive of the place of conflict in human life *vis-à-vis* more mainstream realists such as Williams. This emerges most clearly in Hampshire's review of Williams's *Moral Luck*. Hampshire (1982) approves of Williams's rejection of the Platonist picture which descends upon the Enlightenment: the value-monist picture of harmony under the aegis of certain shared substantive principles, and values, and welcomes his suggestion that conflicts are perpetual and irresolvable; that, abstract theory, the sovereignty of general principles, should be supplanted by theorising which is historical, contextual in nature; and, that morality has, in part, its sources in convention and custom. Yet, Hampshire laments, 'Williams' is 'still more under the influence of Plato than of Heraclitus'. For, Williams does not go as far as to endorse the radical Heraclitian claim that 'it is only an insoluble conflict between values which lends moral significance to existence, and that such conflicts, not an ideal moral consensus, constitute the essence ... of our humanity' (Hampshire, 1982: 13). The Heraclitian point is also elaborated in *Morality and Conflict*:

Neither in a social order, nor in the experience of an individual is a state of conflict a sign of ... *defect, or a malfunctioning*. It is not a deviation from the normal state of a city or of a nation, and it is not a deviation from the normal course of a person's experience (Hampshire, 2000: 40; my emphasis).

Heraclitian realism is not just conceptually different from the ideal/non-ideal theory debate. Rather, it is opposed to the *very terms and assumptions* upon which that debate is set and conducted. Failure to agree on a substantive conception of justice and/or morality, even in ideal circumstances, is neither a mark of unreasonableness nor a testament to our burdened judgement as Rawls and his heirs suggest; it signals *neither* that something has gone 'wrong' (Rawls, 1996: 55), *nor* is it a testament to our irrationality, 'indiscipline' and 'stupidity' – a deviation from what should be seen as the normal, perfect state of affairs (Plato, 1993: 444b). Rather, conflict and our mutual antipathies should be seen as *normal, essential* and, to an extent, *desirable* features of our lives (Shklar, 1984; Berlin, 1980; Hampshire, 2000). To envision a life devoid of conflict and contempt would be to envision a life that is lifeless and inhuman: 'harmony and inner consensus come only with death, when human faces no longer express conflicts but are immobile, composed and at rest' (Hampshire, 1989: 189). Conflict is a necessary source of human vitality; the clashes and antipathies in the *polis* have a

‘life-giving’ quality’ (Hampshire, 1993a: 46). Indeed, to envision a life devoid of conflict would be to envision a life devoid of moral content. For, ‘morality has its sources in conflict’ (Hampshire, 1983: 152). Our capacity to find *substantive* moral meaning and worth in our lives, to pursue what we find meaningful and worthwhile, I highlighted earlier, is conditioned upon our distinctive pattern of experiences and memories *and* the rejection of what we find morally worthless and meaningless. Ways of life, with their own distinctive substantive principles of morality and/or justice do not just lead to conflict and contempt but are, in part, *moulded through* conflict and contempt.

I should, at this point, emphasise two important issues. First, the core insight which animates the realist critique of moralism in general, and the Heraclitian account in particular – that, conflict at the level of city is perpetual and irresolvable; that, the search for common, substantive aspirations, and principles of morality or justice is futile – need not entail a cynical, amoralist ethos. Rather, the point is that the primary purpose of individual and common morality should be preventive or negative as opposed to aspirational or positive: it should be motivated by the *summum malum* as opposed to the *summum bonum*, the search of which is fruitless. Hence, rather than seeking to conceive of, and realise, certain common, substantive, yet abstract aspirations, ideals, and principles of justice or morality – aspirations, ideals, and principles which all rational individuals or members of a community are expected to ascend –, the primary business of morality is the prevention of concrete and ‘perennial evils’, injustices, and immoralities – such as cruelty, fear, and humiliation, – evils which should be prevented ‘almost at all costs’ (Hampshire, 2001: xi – xii; 43; Shklar, 1984; 1989; 1990; Berlin, 1990). Secondly, to suggest that agreement on a common substantive morality is impossible, is not to discount substantive morality as such. Rather, that seeking to fashion abstract, allegedly common positive ideals, principles, and aspirations, realism directs our attention to the ‘particularity of the particular case’ – the role of conventions, traditions, and moral explanations which entail that we should expect an irreducible plurality of different and conflicting positive ideals, principles, and aspirations, as well as a plurality of different and conflicting conceptions of such positive ideals, principles, and aspirations. What emerges from this insight, is a point which has received little attention in contemporary treatments of realism and which might be insufficiently entertained if one places excessive emphasis on, or interprets in superficial a manner, what realists term ‘the ethics first’ or ‘applied ethics’ approach<sup>18</sup>: on this account, moralism in general, and the ideal/non-deal theory debate in particular, do *not* just, by virtue of their emphasis on the conceptual plausibility of harmony, displace politics. They also displace (individual) morality:

Morality and conflict are inseparable: conflict between different and admirable ways of life and between different defensible moral ideals, conflict of obligations, conflict between essential, but incompatible, interests ... [T]he subject matter of morality is misrepresented

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<sup>18</sup> One might argue that Geuss’s (2005; 2008) realism to which such phraseology is traced is oblivious to ethics altogether. This issue is beyond this essay’s remit but see Honig and Stears (2011).

and disappears from view when a moralist concludes with a picture of ... ultimate harmony ... (Hampshire, 1983: 1).

I have highlighted some of the particular problems with the moralist view of self in my earlier treatment of the DH thesis, but the point worth noting here is that because moralism displaces conflict, it is also bound to present us with tasteless caricatures of real persons; it is bound to displace rich plurality of different ways of life which inhabit our political landscape and the substantive, particular values, principles and aspirations which these ways of life espouse – values, interests and aspirations which are antithetical to those to which the moralist espouses and to which he presumes the exercise of reason can enable us to converge. As Hampshire writes:

Liberals ... believe that there is no great moral significance to be attached to the accident of our place of birth and of our inheritance ... [The opponents of liberalism], whom liberals sometimes call fanatics, see destiny, intention, or design in their inheritance, and from their ancestry they infer a ... specific set of duties, and a clear plan for their lives. Perhaps this most fundamental of all oppositions in politics comes from contrasting attitudes to time, historical time. When, famously, “Remember 1689” is chalked on a wall in Belfast by a Roman Catholic calling to mind William III’s Protestant Settlements, it would most certainly be useless to respond: “Be fair and reasonable: forget the injustices of the past, as you see them, because the past cannot now be repaired: it is more fair and reasonable to start from now ...” The response comes back: “You are asking us to forget who we are ... We should cease to exist as a community if we thought only of the future and of what you call reasonableness” (1996: 159)

The innocent belief that, in theory, rational agents can agree on certain society-wide, substantive moral principles, values and interests entails that moralism is bound to put forward an abstract conception of persons which obscures features which are central to our *particular* identity, history and substantive conception of morality: our distinctive pattern of experiences and emotions; our attachment with certain groups and rejection and contempt of others; our *particular* understanding of *our* life and its moral purpose; our *particular* substantive values, principles and aspirations (Hampshire, 2001: 25 – 26; Shklar, 1984: 78; Berlin, 1980). The moralist failure to account for *what we reject and loathe* entails a failure to capture *who we are and what we morally stand for*.

What is peculiar to Heraclitian realism, then, is that it does not merely suggest that we should *lower our political and moral expectations as non-ideal theorists dictate* but, rather, that our *entire system of moral and political expectations is confused and should be recalibrated*. This does not just concern the way we appraise our societal circumstances and lives *qua* moral agents. It also speaks directly to the manner we should appraise our lives *qua* citizens – the way we conceive of public virtue and integrity. *Pace* Sigwart (2013: 432), it is not

the case that realism ‘raises the question of how to preserve moral integrity’ in politics. That remark is infused with a Walzerian, moralist flavour which, at the very least, obscures the realist point that Sigwart seeks to vindicate: that ‘the fundamental paradoxes and contradictions of public ethics cannot be dissolved’ (2013: 413). As suggested following Berlin, Hampshire, and Shklar, the rift between moral and public integrity is not just irresolvable and perpetual but also normal and essential an aspect of humanity. That ‘ends equally ultimate, equally sacred, may contradict each other’, Berlin reminds us, is ‘part of the normal human situation’: tragic conflict is not ‘the result of abnormality or error’, or – DH theorists take note – something that occurs ‘merely in exceptional circumstances’ (1980: 74 – 75; see also Berlin 1969: 169).

To repeat, public integrity is not ‘a block of marble’, and is not akin to moral integrity, the innocence and rigidity of the saint (Hampshire, 1993). Rather, it is inescapably and naturally intertwined with fragmentation, conflicting desires and demands – the capacity to frequently one’s hands dirty, by practicing certain vices in public life for the sake of securing and preserving the paramount goods of civility and order. The ability to compromise and betray some of our substantive aspirations in action, to dissimulate and hypocritically veil our contempt for others who espouse different views, though problematic from the perspective of moral integrity, need not be unworthy in toto; for, it forms part and parcel of public integrity, and constitutes an essential lubricant of public affairs. Unlike the Walzerian, anguish-riven innocent public agent, a person of experience – the embodiment of Hampshire’s, Berlin’s and Shklar’s realist ethos – does not gaze at the future with the single-minded hope of and belief in final harmony, either in the soul or the polis, but is prepared to ‘live with contradictions, unresolvable conflicts’ (Shklar, 1984: 249). The innocent quest for harmony entails shutting one’s eyes to the nuances and moral grubbiness of politics, without abolishing them. At best, that quest might find manifestation in an Alcestian eagerness to ‘resolve’ such conflicts once-and-for-all, by seeking a ‘solitary place’ to avoid contact with humankind (Moliere, 2000: 114). At worst, it might find expression in a zealous, uncontaminated and corrosive candour or an explicitly violent, Robespierrian will to impose one’s substantive principles come what may, and reduce the rest of us into ‘a Procrustean bed of some rigid dogma’ (Berlin, 1997: 77). The quest for harmony and salvation is not conducive to good citizenship or public integrity. At best, it might prompt exodus from public life. At worst, it might jeopardize the maintenance of a shared public space and the goods politics should shelter: a modicum of stability, order and civility. This is a point those immersed into the ideal/non-ideal theory debate should pay attention to. The pursuit of harmony under the aegis of agreement on certain substantive principles, values and aspirations that preoccupies that debate is not just futile. It might have disastrous *moral* and *political* implications if applied into practice. ‘Our experiences’, Shklar reminds us, ‘are too various ... to be fit into general rules ... and any attempt to impose them tends to backfire. Far from reducing our cruelties, rules simply redirect and formalise our ferocity’ (1990: 26).



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