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Political Integrity and Dirty Hands: Compromise and the Ambiguities of Betrayal

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Abstract

The claim that democratic politics is the art of compromise is a platitude but we seem allergic to compromise in politics when it happens. This essay explores this paradox. Taking my cue from Machiavelli's claim that there exists a rift between a morally admirable and a virtuous political life I argue that: i) a 'compromising disposition' is an ambiguous virtue – something which is politically expedient but not necessarily morally admirable; ii) whilst uncongenial to moral integrity, a 'compromising disposition' constitutes an essential part of political integrity. In so doing, I question certain moralistic assumptions which fuel contemporary vilifications of compromise – that, in theory, democratic politics should be inhospitable to compromise and that political integrity should be akin to moral integrity – and which are shared by Walzer's Dirty Hands thesis which professes to be sensitive to the realities of politics. These assumptions displace the complex realities of politics and misconstrue the standards of political excellence; they unsatisfactorily idealize political integrity and the messy context in which democratic politicians operate – a context characterized by a plurality of incompatible traditions, each with its own values and principles. Whilst commitment to a set of principles stemming from one's tradition or pre-election promises implies commitment to realize these, leading a virtuous political life amidst such a grubby domain often requires abandoning some of these. An innocent, all-or-nothing pursuit of one's principles in politics might prompt political disaster or defeat: an uncompromising disposition entails the entire abandonment of any hope of realizing all of those principles.

Keywords

Compromise, political integrity, dirty hands, democratic politics, moral conflict, betrayal

Politics, especially in its democratic form, it is often said, is the art of compromise (Wittman, 1995; Elshain, 1995). And yet, despite being widely practiced in politics, compromise is largely ignored by philosophers (Bellamy et al, 2012; Fumurescu, 2013). "Compromise", Margalit writes, seems "messy, the dreary stuff of day-to-day politics" (2012, pp. 5- 6). At best, even those who concede that compromise might obtain in practice tend to view it as an unnecessary feature of democratic politics – something which is, at least in theory, avoidable¹. At worst, practitioners of compromise are often degraded as unprincipled altogether. "A politician", Mencken remarks, must "make so many compromises that he becomes indistinguishable from a streetwalker" (1946, p. 4). A 'compromising disposition'², Mencken suggests, is an unacceptable quality: it signals the lack of integrity. This negative view of compromise extends beyond the confines of philosophical analysis (c.f. Gutmann & Thompson, 2012; Benjamin, 1990). Consider the press reaction to the 2010 Liberal Democrat-Conservative Coalition, where both parties abandoned some of their pre-election pledges to become partners in government. "Clegg", *The Guardian* reports, "became tarnished by ... broken promises" (Jack, 2012). "The coalition", Wilby adds, "brought betrayals of manifesto commitments ... unprecedented in British politics" (2012). "Clegg", *The Mirror* emphasizes, "sold his principles and his party's soul for a fancy title".

¹ This point is raised by philosophers who criticize the moralism of contemporary political thought – its focus on societal consensus and harmony as opposed to compromise and conflict (c.f. Honig, 1993; Galston, 2010; Mills, 2000; Gray, 2005).

² I borrow this term from Gutmann and Thompson (2012).

These remarks unearth an odd paradox: the claim that politics is the art of compromise is a widely accepted platitude but we seem allergic to compromise in politics when it happens³. This essay explores this paradox. Taking its cue from Machiavelli's (1998) claim that there exists a rift between a morally admirable and a virtuous political life, it argues that: i) a 'compromising disposition' is an ambiguous virtue – something which is politically expedient but not necessarily morally admirable; ii) whilst uncongenial to moral integrity, a 'compromising disposition' constitutes an essential part of political integrity. Compromise, I suggest, is inescapable in democratic politics – not just *in extremis* but also as part of our ordinary practices – and that acknowledging this helps us make better sense of the distinctiveness of political virtue and integrity.

Whilst I accept that compromise might also obtain outside politics, my defence of it is fundamentally political; it builds on the recognition that making sense of political ethics requires us to approach politics as a distinct practice and way of life, with its own demands and standards of excellence⁴. To be clear, I do not deny that compromise poses serious issues to our politics. Nor, do I wish to suggest that politicians should *always* compromise their principles or present an all-encompassing account of how they should *act*. What I merely wish to suggest is that the standards of political excellence stem from *within* politics, not from an external, abstract moral standpoint. Adequately capturing what is peculiar of political integrity requires us to consider more carefully the context in which politicians operate and certain goods which are intrinsic to a virtuous political life and the qualities of character necessary for securing these; or, in reverse, certain dispositions which are uncongenial to and might jeopardize virtuous political practice. Differently put, I shall suggest that, it is certain inalienable features of politics – the struggle for power, the satisfaction of one's commitments amidst a domain of conflict and dependence – which partly shape the standards of political excellence and the nature of political integrity. In so doing, I wish to question certain moralistic assumptions which *partly* fuel the negative view of compromise – that, at least in theory, democratic politics should be inhospitable to compromise and that compromise and a 'compromising disposition' are uncongenial to political integrity and virtue⁵. These assumptions, I argue, displace the messy realities of politics and misconstrue the standards of political excellence; they unsatisfactorily idealize political integrity and the context in which democratic politicians operate.

My argument does not just illuminate the pressing question of what sort of character and integrity politicians should have. Nor is my critique merely levelled against the moralism of the negative view of compromise. Rather, my discussion also contributes to the literature on dirty hands (DH); my critique is directed against the DH thesis which is mostly owed to Walzer (1973; 2004) and de Wijze (2005; 2012) and which purportedly challenges the moralism permeating vilifications of compromise. Whilst DH theorists claim to be sensitive to the moral messiness of politics, their account, I argue, is susceptible to a similar sort of moralism exhibited by critics of compromise: DH theorists cannot capture the complexity of compromise and its ubiquitous necessity

³ This paradox is captured by Gutmann and Thompson: whilst there is great "public support for compromise *in general*" and in the abstract, they note, the public is unsupportive of concrete compromises on particular issues such as "immigration, taxation, government spending, the environment" or "abortion" (2012, p. 26).

⁴ I defend this controversial point in more detail and set the general foundations of this practice-based approach to political ethics in Tillyris (2015a; 2015b).

⁵ I say partly because, as I explain, the negative view is also expressed by politicians for *political* reasons. I do not claim that this view can be eliminated from politics. I rather wish to explore certain moralistic assumptions which underpin it and which misconstrue democratic politics, political virtue and integrity.

in politics because they misconstrue what is distinctive of political integrity and the context in which politicians operate⁶.

The discussion proceeds as follows. First, I provide a sketch of compromise. I consider how it differs from the notion of consensus which has received more attention from philosophers. Second, I explore the negative view of compromise and some of its underlying assumptions: the conviction that moral and political goodness and integrity should co-exist in harmony – a conviction which, I argue, is paradoxically shared by the DH thesis. I then suggest that attempts to deny the pervasive necessity of compromise misconstrue the realities of politics: they mischaracterize the context in which politicians operate and what is distinctive of political integrity. Politicians operate amidst a messy context characterized by a plurality of conflicting, incompatible traditions – each with its own substantive values, aspirations and interests. In light of this, I argue that compromise is bound to be necessary in politics: whilst commitment to a set of values and principles stemming from one’s tradition or pre-election promises implies commitment to seeing them realized, leading a virtuous political life amidst such a grubby domain often requires compromising these. An uncompromising disposition – an innocent, all-or-nothing pursuit of one’s principles in politics – might prompt political disaster or defeat: a rigid refusal to compromise *some* of one’s principles entails the entire abandonment of any hope of realizing *all* of those principles.

Compromise: A Preliminary Consideration.

A compromise constitutes a type of outcome of a conflict but also a process for resolving it (Benjamin, 1990). A precondition of any compromise is the existence of interpersonal/societal conflict. Compromise occurs amidst a context of plural and conflicting commitments, aspirations and interests; it involves situations where individuals have decided which course dovetails with their best judgement but find themselves opposed to others whose judgement has led them to a conflicting position. Whilst I do not wish to offer an exhaustive account of compromise (or present the ensuing discussion as such), I shall build on this general understanding of compromise to highlight certain aspects of it and which are relevant for the discussion of this notion in politics.

The question worth asking – if we are to capture some of the charges often levelled against compromise – is this: if compromise occurs amidst conflict, how does it differ from consensus? Both notions seem similar. A consensus constitutes an agreement and a process of reaching agreement amidst conflict (Bellamy et al, 2012). In contrast to a compromise, however, a consensus is reached when parties agree on their opinions; or, when their aspirations are congruent with an overarching conception of morality and/or justice (van Parijs, 2012). For instance, if we are to split a cake in circumstances in which we like to eat the whole thing but we both share the same *substantive* principles (we agree that dividing the cake equally is fair) a consensus is possible. “A consensus”, Bellamy et al note, “not only resolves the situation of conflict itself; the reasons of the conflict will also have been deliberated away” (2012, p. 284). The belief in the possibility of consensus, whilst presupposing the existence of *prima facie* pluralism and conflict, is underpinned by the assumption that a tidy agreement *does*

⁶ My argument uncovers a divide in the DH literature: between moralists (Walzer and de Wijze) and philosophers labelled as DH theorists (Hampshire, Williams and Hollis) who account for the messy realities politics. See Tillyris (2015a).

exist – that, interpersonal conflicts are perfectly, rationally resolvable by appeal to a common set of substantive moral principles.

This point marks important differences between the two concepts. Even though compromise constitutes a solution to interpersonal conflicts, such a solution is neither perfect nor tidy (Bellamy et al, 2012). To return to the stylized example of splitting the cake, if we appeal to different principles – if I claim the entire cake because I baked it, whereas you claim it because you have been dieting – a consensus is unattainable because disagreement cuts deeper. It is in these instances where compromise is feasible. A compromise reveals the existence of real, deep and insurmountable conflict: its pursuit suggests that agreement on substantive principles of morality and/or justice is unattainable: the parties involved embrace different, irreconcilable principles and values (or conceptions of these principles and values). Whilst compromise is intertwined with peace, it does not entail ‘peace’ or harmony in the Utilitarian or Kantian sense of perpetual suppression of conflict: the conflict and its grounds do not evaporate once agreement is reached. Whilst a consensus is regulated by determinate, substantive shared principles of morality and/or justice and is morally demanding, in compromises the parties cooperate because doing so constitutes a ‘lesser evil’⁷. Though the outcome of a compromise could be similar to that of a consensus (we might divide the cake evenly even if we believe that this is substantially unjust), the absence of a common set of overarching, substantive values entails that the terms of compromise-based agreements are more open. Compromise, as presented here, is much thinner in substantive moral content.

Further, because compromise “has nothing to do with the abandonment or denial of conflictuality” (Arnsperger & Picavet, 2004, p. 168), in compromises each party gains something but *not* everything. The absence of a common set of substantive principles of morality and/or justice via which parties can perfectly, rationally resolve their disagreement entails that compromises carry a moral remainder: to reach agreement, something of value has to be sacrificed at the expense of something else (Zanetti, 2011). And, to reach agreement, each party is required to negotiate or cooperate with and ‘hear the other side’ – even when the other side and its substantive values appear to be despicable and misguided⁸. The recognition that in compromises the parties cooperate for prudential reasons – even if they regard one another as substantively immoral/unjust – and sacrifice some of their substantive values or principles helps us to encapsulate the intricate relationship between compromise *qua* agreement and process and compromise *simpliciter*, often captured by the adage that ‘to compromise is to compromise oneself’: it is to betray your principles and to confer a degree of legitimacy to the other side (c.f.

⁷ A consensus is explicitly supported, not merely forged for pragmatic reasons. Hence, my account differs from the Rawlsian conviction that pluralism precludes only agreement on the good, not on justice. Pluralism, I contend, entails that conflict cuts deeper: agreement on the good *and* justice is implausible – that Rawls’s principles of justice are expressive of the liberal tradition which is just one tradition and comprehensive moral doctrine amongst the many (c.f. Hampshire, 1993; Bellamy 2010). This sort of moral demandingness and misconception of pluralism and conflict also permeates contemporary accounts of reconciliation, emphasizing “solidarity, and social unity”, “respect” and “reciprocity” (May, 2011, pp. 589 – 590; see also Horton, 2011). *Contra* these accounts my conception of compromise resembles Shklar’s (1989) and Williams’s (2002) ‘liberalism of fear’ or Horton’s (2010) and Gray’s (2001) *modus vivendi*: it is predominantly about damage control. Given this, it does not follow that the parties should unconditionally honour the compromises they strike (c.f. Hollis, 1982). Addressing this issue is beyond this essay’s scope but note that because politics is intertwined with conflict, the parties might compromise but defect if politically necessary (and, if doing so does not jeopardize some of the political goods I identify).

⁸ Negotiation and persuasion reinforce the perception of compromise as a messy agreement and are unnecessary in a consensus where a solution congruent with each party’s substantive values exists (Laden, 2007).

Fumurescu, 2013) . In compromises, then, the parties refrain from doing what they consider the *tout court* right thing to do and settle for a course of action which is, at best, second rate and which simultaneously contains elements of rightfulness and wrongfulness⁹ (Zanetti, 2011). What *prima facie* emerges from all this is a recognition that I explore in detail later on: the possibility of compromise does not just reveal the existence of societal, *interpersonal conflict* – that is, conflict between different individuals or groups each of which espouses incompatible conceptions and substantive principles of morality and justice. It also reveals the existence of *intrapersonal conflict* – that is, a rift in individual morality: between a morally admirable and a virtuous political life, each of which is characterized by certain distinct and incompatible ends, goods and standards of excellence. The point here is that compromise will seem unacceptable altogether if viewed *only* from a moral perspective – from the viewpoint of a *single* party and its substantive values or that of a coherent, substantive theory of morality, justice or moral integrity. It will also seem conceptually incoherent¹⁰ (c.f. Santayana, 1926). For, it is not just that compromise falls short, in the sense that something valuable is forfeited. Unlike consensus-based agreements, compromises contain an assemblage of jointly inconsistent and not wholeheartedly endorsed principles. Whilst the agreement is grudgingly accepted, “the disagreements among the parties are embodied in the compromise itself”; few of its partial components are acceptable to *all* parties (Gutmann & Thompson, 2012: 12).

To illustrate some of these features, consider the 2010 Liberal Democrat-Conservative coalition: each side jettisoned some of its policies to advance others and promoted policies which were incongruent with its manifesto and pre-election promises and which were thought to be wrong. The coalition is not “a consensus because it involves all sides accepting a settlement that falls short of what they regard as right or good”. Both parties “chose to hold their noses and to do certain things they would rather not have done” (Bellamy, 2012, p. 449). For instance, the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives compromised their pledges on student fees and immigration respectively. And, whilst the Coalition enunciates three shared principles – freedom, fairness and responsibility – the parties “diverge considerably in their interpretation of them” (Bellamy, 2012, p. 453). Had this agreement satisfied both parties’ first-options or stemmed from a shared set of substantive values or principles we would not speak of a compromise.

The reception of the Coalition by a considerable portion of the press, I gestured, epitomizes a particular way of thinking about compromise which is echoed by a rather large strand of philosophical thought: the negative view of compromise. I shall now provide an outline of this view and some of the assumptions which underpin and partly sustain it. This view, I suggest, erroneously conflates moral and political integrity and displaces the messy realities of politics; it misconstrues the context in which politicians operate and what is distinctive of political integrity.

⁹ Note that compromises involve the modification of one’s principles *in action* as opposed to modification *tout court* and in light of an overarching conception of morality/justice inherent in consensus-based agreements.

¹⁰ As Fumurescu (2013) suggests, the ‘one-dimensional’ man often propounded by philosophers displaces the ambiguity and complexity of compromise; it obscures the relationship between one’s *forum externum* – the social or public realm – and *forum internum* – the realm of conscience.

Compromise, Integrity and Democratic Politics: A Critique of the Negative View

What is remarkable about a large portion of philosophical thought, Goodstein observes, is that its very history is intertwined with “a history of antipathy to the topic of compromise”¹¹ (2000, p. 808). No doubt, the 2010 Coalition did not escape this antipathy. Now, this attitude can be partially explained by acknowledging that the British public is unaccustomed to coalitions: coalitions are less common in Britain (in elections and whilst governing) as opposed to the US Congress, for instance, where they are the norm (McLean, 2012). However, even in contexts where compromise is widely practiced it is not viewed more favourably. A breezy survey of the attitudes of Americans towards compromise echoes the paradox that I registered earlier: Americans accept that compromise is part and parcel of democratic politics but they simultaneously “like politicians who stick to their positions” (Gutmann & Thompson, 2012, p. 25). This becomes more apparent by highlighting the reception of particular compromises by a large portion of the American public and press – for instance, the cries of despair heard against the mismatch between Obama’s pre-election promises and presidency¹². “In the 2008 campaign”, Gutmann and Thompson note, Obama “promised to reject tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans. Now he was proposing to accept them. His Democratic critics cried betrayal. Stick to the principles you championed in the campaign” (2011, p. 1).

What seems to fuel the negative view is a hopeful vision: the belief that, at least in theory, there should exist a continuity and harmony between a morally admirable and a virtuous political life. Differently put, this view is underpinned by the conviction that political integrity should be akin to moral integrity or, what Hollis (1982) terms, the integrity and consistency of the saint. This monistic conception of integrity lurks in the background of most philosophical discussions of this notion: integrity is understood as the capacity to steadfastly uphold one’s values and aspirations (May, 1996; Blustein, 1991; Rand 1996; Broad, 1952; Halfon, 1990; Beerbohm, 2012). “Integrity”, McFall writes, “requires that an agent subscribe to: i) some consistent set of principles or commitments; ii) in the face of temptation or challenge iii) uphold these principles” (1987, p. 9). Bauman’s account of leadership integrity pushes this point further: integrity is intertwined with the certain moral virtues, such as unconditional faithfulness to one’s principles and commitments as well as unswerving honesty and trustworthiness; a leader with integrity, Bauman writes, “is a person who can be trusted not only to do what she has promised to stand by moral values even when compromise may provide her with great gain” (2013: 422). This person, he surmises, “will not violate moral values lest she be unfaithful to her deepest commitments and thereby corrupt herself” (Bauman, 2013, p. 422). On this account, compromise is discarded as unacceptable and unprincipled altogether, because of its link to a host of seemingly distinct moral vices – betrayal, unfaithfulness and deception. To compromise is to thus plunge into vice; it is to soil one’s purity, innocence and integrity.

I do not wish to suggest that some of the insights of the negative view have no purchase *at all*. For, democratic politicians “have a responsibility to their followers to increase the chances of achieving what they stand for” and

¹¹ This might seem an exaggeration but most philosophers since Plato advance a vision of rational harmony in individual morality – between morality and politics – and in the *polis* – a consensus on substantive moral principles, values and aspirations – which curtails the room for compromise (c.f. Hampshire, 1989; 2000). And, as I illustrate, even those who defend the necessity of compromise premise their argument on abstract, moral premises and are bound to reject some compromises or fail to capture their ubiquity in politics.

¹² Similar cries were heard when Bush Senior reneged on his ‘Read my lips. No new taxes’ pledge (c.f. Smith, 1990; Mullins & Wildavsky, 1992; Gutmann & Thompson, 2012).

materialize their pre-election promises (Gutmann & Thompson, 2012, p. 149). Yet, as indicated, compromise carries a remainder: a ‘compromising disposition’ entails a willingness to sacrifice a portion of one’s substantive interests, values or public proclamations and to promote policies or actions favoured by one’s political rivals – policies or actions which might reflect interests and values one disapproves and is committed against. And, democratic politicians who compromise do not merely stand accused of betraying their tradition and their parties’ manifesto. Political compromises often entail the breaking of some electoral commitments – some of which were the reasons why the demos voted for the politicians in question in the first place. The relationship between compromise and the vices of betrayal, unfaithfulness and deception bears an additional property in the contemporary democratic context: the victim is also the electorate.

To acknowledge that compromise is intertwined with betrayal, unfaithfulness and deception or some sort of wrongdoing, however, does not entail that it should not be practiced in democratic politics. To be sure, this acknowledgement unearths some of the reasons why the negative view is so often expressed by democratic politicians *in public*; for instance, as part of their quest for political success – their endeavour to rise to power and remain in it – and their dependence on the demos, politicians frequently portray themselves as innocent, morally pure and as upholding an uncompromising stance: they publically deny that they will compromise their commitments once elected, they refuse that they have compromised and even accuse their competitors for betrayal and deception¹³ (c.f. Gutmann & Thompson, 2012; Boudreaux & Lee, 1997; Grant, 1997). But, in the theatre of politics, Machiavelli (1998) writes, the appearance of innocence is insufficient an indication of its actual presence. All too often it reveals and is intended to conceal its absence. Differently put, the appearance of ‘all honesty’ and ‘all faith’ is politically necessary but it does not follow that these moral virtues should be unconditionally practiced in politics (Machiavelli, 1998, p. 70). Nor, are such virtues political virtues or, in fact, definitive of political integrity. An *uncompromising stance* need not entail an *uncompromising disposition*¹⁴. The substantive claim which underpins the negative view, I contend, is unsatisfactorily moralistic and unwarranted: it is not the case that compromise is unprincipled, immoral *tout court*. It does not follow that virtuosos of political compromise are characterized by a profound lack of integrity as the negative view suggests (c.f. Meehan, 1984; Rand, 1996; Mencken, 1946; Bauman, 2013) Nor, is it plausible (or desirable) to moralize political life. For:

Many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth; for it is so far from how one lives to how one should live that he who lets go of what is done for what should be done learns his ruin rather than his preservation ... It is necessary to a prince, if he wants to maintain himself, to learn to be able not to be good, and to use this and not use it according to necessity (Machiavelli, 1998, p. 61).

Machiavelli’s remark uncovers the existence of a perpetual rift between a morally admirable and a virtuous political life which cannot be brought into harmony neither in theory nor in practice: political practitioners are subject to standards of excellence and virtues which are at odds with the innocence and purity we might hope to observe in an admirable moral life. Making sense of political ethics, in short, requires us to conceive of politics

¹³ An uncompromising stance might also serve politicians well in negotiations – in striking compromises that maximize their gains *vis-à-vis* those of their opponents (c.f. Luban, 1985).

¹⁴ For what is worth, even Clinton, Boehner and Reagan (amongst others), who publically adopted this stance successfully, did compromise. See Gutmann and Thompson (2012), Boudreaux and Lee (1997), Himelfarb and Perotti (2004).

as a distinct practice and way of life with its own standards of excellence and goods – for instance, the provision of a modicum of order and security, the capacity to rise to and remain in power and to advance some of one’s more positive values and interests¹⁵. Political excellence cannot aim at anything outside itself: an adequate account of political ethics and political integrity must draw on the resources of politics itself, not by ‘imagining republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist’. Whereas for moralists political virtue is defined by appeal to an external moral standpoint, for Machiavelli and his heirs, political virtue and integrity are defined from *within* politics and the context in which politicians operate – a context riddled with competing traditions, each with its own substantive aspirations, interests and values (Machiavelli, 1998; 1996; Hollis, 1982; Hampshire, 2000; Williams, 2002; Berlin, 1981). Put simply, the rift between a morally admirable and a virtuous political life is partially conditioned on the recognition that a consensus on a set of substantive principles of morality and/or justice is implausible – that conflict is also manifested externally: between different political agents. Politicians are not self-sufficient: they operate in a messy, conflict-ridden domain and amidst complex webs of dependencies which affect what is achievable even under the most favourable circumstances and which shape the standards of political excellence and the nature of political integrity. It is this recognition, I argue, which renders compromise and ‘a compromising disposition’ necessary in politics and essential aspects of political integrity. What I want to highlight for now, is that to conflate moral and political integrity would amount to a lapse into an innocent idealism. To use Williams’s (2002, p. 2) words, this would erroneously “make the moral prior to the political”: it would misrepresent the messy context in which politicians operate and the peculiar nature of political ethics and integrity. These problems also permeate the orthodox DH thesis. Or, so I argue.

Compromise, Integrity and the DH thesis

To suggest that the DH thesis is oblivious to the necessity of compromise in politics and the moral messiness of this domain seems to be a mistake. For, that thesis professes to be alive to Machiavelli’s claim that we should take the realities of politics seriously and his suggestion that morality and politics conflict. The DH thesis suggests that in certain tragic circumstances democratic politicians should compromise their principles for the sake of political success; they may have to do or tolerate actions that are immoral (Walzer, 1973; de Wijze, 2005). In such instances, it is argued, there exists a conflict between the demands of morality – which are taken to be Kantian/deontological – and the requirements of successful political action – which are thought to be Utilitarian/consequentialist. An “act of government”, Walzer suggests, “may be exactly the right thing to do in utilitarian terms and yet leave the man who does it guilty of a moral wrong. The innocent man, afterwards, is no longer innocent” (1973, p. 168). Whilst the politician should opt for the requirements of politics, he becomes morally polluted: his choice carries a remainder. “Whenever a value or principle is ... compromised”, Blattberg explains, there exists “a degree of immorality, and so dirtiness ... even if the action in question is ultimately the right one overall” (2013, p. 1). Thus, the DH thesis questions “the coherence and harmony of the moral universe” and “the relative ease of living a moral life” (Walzer, 1973, p. 161). It suggests that the Kantian and Utilitarian vision of harmony between morality and politics is unsatisfactorily moralistic: its value-monism misrepresents our fragmented morality and messiness of politics.

¹⁵ This need not entail that order and security are absolute or unconditional goods. However, these ‘negative’ goods are of fundamental importance – securing these is a condition for pursuing other, more positive, goods and substantive values (c.f. Berlin, 1990; Williams, 2002; Hall, 2013).

Whilst the word compromise features in orthodox discussions of DH and seems to be central to the DH thesis, DH theorists fail to capture compromise in all its complexity. The DH thesis cannot account for the pervasive necessity of compromise in politics. It captures *neither* the centrality of this notion to political integrity nor what is distinctive of political practice and integrity. To illustrate this, let me begin by highlighting what is troublesome with the conceptual structure of the DH thesis. That thesis is inadequately ‘static’: it conceives of the conflict between morality and politics (or moral and political integrity) as a momentary, rare episode – a tragic, unfortunate anomaly which disrupts the normality of harmony. The allusions, popular amongst DH theorists, to ‘innocence lost’ and ‘moral integrity violated or compromised’ suggest this much (Walzer, 1973; de Wijze, 2005; 2009; 2012). The departing assumption of the DH thesis is an innocent or good man – a man of moral integrity – who, upon entering politics, is compelled to compromise his principles and momentarily forfeit his innocence and tarnish his integrity. Even more telling, is Walzer’s hopeful but puzzling conviction that:

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

The DH thesis assumes that moral and political integrity are (and should be) in harmony until a stark situation which requires acting immorally and compromising one’s principles is presented to the agent. Whilst that thesis acknowledges that, in rare cases, politicians should *not* exhibit the moral integrity and consistency of the saint, it presupposes that innocence and moral integrity need not be irretrievably lost or tarnished in politics. It is, in short, not implausible to envision some sort of harmony between moral and political integrity: politicians might, in certain momentary episodes, have to compromise their principles and act immorally – episodes in which moral and political integrity part ways – but this is not the normal and desirable state of affairs. Moral and political integrity are not that different. Nor are compromise and the vices of betrayal, unfaithfulness and deception perpetual and inherent features of political integrity or of a virtuous political life. “We don’t”, Walzer explains, “want to be ruled by men who have lost their souls”. “A politician”, he adds, “needs a soul” (1973, p. 177 – 178). The DH thesis, de Wijze (2012: 199) similarly notes, “explores ... how *good people* can be morally compromised”. It ponders how “*good and moral persons* [can] become and remain effective politicians”; it considers how “those engaged in *realpolitik* maintain their moral integrity” and “what happens to a *politician’s moral goodness and integrity* when the only way to ensure peace and stability for the state requires the use of immoral means such as deceit [and] manipulation” (de Wijze, 2012, p. 190; my emphasis).

What emerges from orthodox DH theorists’ conviction that there should exist a space where a politician can be virtuous *qua* his practice *and* remain morally good and innocent is a reinstatement of the moralism I seek to reject. It is a restatement of the ‘order’ against which Machiavelli conveyed the idea that virtuous politicians ‘must learn how not to be good’. *Pace* DH theorists, it is not the case that moral and political integrity should be seen as coexisting in harmony, yet abnormal, rare and stark conditions can occur, in which these conflict and politicians are compelled to compromise their principles. Rather, there exists, I gestured, a rift between two different, incompatible ways of life. And each of these ways of life is characterized by its own *distinct* and incongruent standards of excellence and conceptions of integrity. One can either save one’s soul and lead a life of moral integrity and innocence or virtuously engage in politics, not both at once (Berlin, 1981). Simply put,

politicians should subscribe to standards of excellence which are at odds with those of an innocent, morally admirable way of life but which are ultimate. Unconditionally upholding one's principles and commitments, practicing the virtues of honesty and faithfulness though the heavens fall might be conducive to the latter and definitive of moral integrity, but they cannot sustain a virtuous political life. The qualities of a virtuous politician are prudential; if one innocently indulges oneself with one's purity and soul whilst aspiring to lead a political life, one had better stay away from politics. Innocence and purity regardless of how morally admirable they may be are not political virtues. They are vices. For, a virtuous political life is sustained by the disposition of experience – the *sine qua non* of political virtue and *complete* antithesis to innocence: “a person of experience”, takes the claims of politics seriously and is aware “that his usual choice will be the lesser of two or more evils” (Hampshire, 1989, p. 170). A life of politics entails irresolvable conflicts – both within the *polis*, between different practitioners of politics as well as within individual morality, between morality and politics. It is also intertwined with and unavoidable “squalor and imperfection”, situations in which politicians are required to compromise their principles and commitments (Hampshire, 1989, p. 170). These are neither unfortunate nor rare, momentary episodes. They are crucial aspects of the lives politicians lead and are central to political integrity. In short, political integrity and experience entail the fox-like capacity to manoeuvre amidst conflict; to dexterously manage situations in which ‘it is impossible to remove one inconvenience without another emerging’ (Machiavelli, 2013, I: 6, p. 6). And this, Machiavelli (1998; 1996) emphasizes, often entails the ability to maintain a moral front, by seeming to be innocent, perfectly honest and faithful to one's principles as well as to others, while breaking faith, compromising and betraying one's principles and others when politically necessary¹⁶.

Thus the DH thesis, by virtue of its ‘static’ nature, collapses into the moralistic vision of harmony in political morality it claims to evade; it misconstrues the conflict between morality and politics and fails to fully capture what is distinctive of politics and the lives politicians lead. I have explored what is problematic with the moralism permeating the static DH thesis elsewhere (c.f. Tillyris, 2015a). What I want to emphasize here is that the DH thesis’ misplaced belief in the possibility of a final harmony between moral and political integrity – its failure to grapple that compromise and betrayal are pervasive features of politics and essential aspects of political integrity – is partially sustained by an equally idealistic picture of the context in which politicians operate. For, as gestured, a precondition of compromise is the existence of societal, interpersonal conflict. As such, compromise is bound to remain elusive for Utilitarians and Kantians who seek to suppress individual *and* societal conflict through the derivation of abstract, substantive moral principles which all rational agents ought to embrace. By implication, it is also bound to remain elusive for DH theorists¹⁷.

Whilst DH theorists correctly identify certain problems with Kantianism and Utilitarianism – their vision of innocence and harmony in individual morality – they do not question the overall validity and premises of such theories. Walzer's (1973; 2004) portrayal of DH as a conflict between deontological dictums which are thought

¹⁶ For a defence of dissimulation in democratic politics see Hollis (1982), Bellamy (2010).

¹⁷ Note that whilst de Wijze characterizes DH as a conflict between impossible ‘oughts’, his account subsumes and does not reject Walzer's characterization. Further, his account can *only* capture one-person conflicts; it ignores that politicians are members of different traditions, each with its own incompatible ‘oughts’ and that achieving some of these requires compromising with their rivals.

to be intrinsic to morality and utilitarian imperatives which momentarily re-impose themselves in politics, is suggestive. Whilst the DH thesis seeks to mend some of the insights of such theories, it proceeds via an *a priori* commitment to the very abstract, universal principles propounded by these theories. What is problematic with Kantianism and Utilitarianism is not just, as DH theorists suggest, that they misconstrue our fragmented morality and the messiness of politics because they merely fail to entertain individual, one-person conflicts – conflicts between individual morality and politics. Rather, such theories misconstrue our fragmented morality and displace political reality because they cannot entertain societal conflicts:

[The] picture of harmony under the governance of reason ... persists in the philosophy of the Enlightenment, and it persists in contemporary liberalism ... Whatever the contingent differences between us arising from our personal history the king in his castle and the peasant in his hovel are one, in their common humanity, in virtue of the overriding superiority of rational moral principles that king and peasant both implicitly recognize (Hampshire, 2000, p. 157).

By virtue of their emphasis on the possibility of rational agreement on certain substantive, universal moral values, both such theories assign a certain priority to the moral over the political; they put forward a vision of societal consensus which misconstrues the moral messiness of politics and the context in which politicians operate – a context ridden with a plurality of competing and conflicting traditions, each with its own conception of the good and justice, which cannot be brought into harmony nor cashed into a set of substantive, universal principles of morality/justice in any final synthesis. “The idea of the political”, Williams remarks, “is to an important degree focused in the idea of political disagreement ... [and] political difference is of the essence of politics” (2002, pp. 77 – 78). Note that the belief in rational agreement and consensus on certain substantive values is insensitive to political reality does not just entail that that belief is merely practically difficult to achieve but nonetheless conceivable (*pace* Gutmann & Thompson, 2012; Philp, 2007; Valentini, 2012; Hamlin & Stemplowska, 2012; Freedon, 2012). What is at stake here is not merely a matter of practical ‘feasibility’ or ‘constraint’ but rather a question of what should be seen as plausible *even* in theory, *even* under the most ideal of circumstances. To proceed by *a priori* envisioning the possibility of consensus and agreement on substantive principles of morality and/or justice under the aegis of reason is to begin from a point that is external to politics. It is to propound a vision that is an innocent fairy-tale; for, there is nowhere evidence that reason can lead practitioners of politics to converge on certain substantive principles, whatever these may be. History suggests that precisely the opposite is the case: “all determination is negation” (Hampshire, 2000, p. 34). Historically, groups have defined themselves – their conception of the good *and* justice – in oppositional terms: not just in terms of *who they are* and *what they espouse* but also in terms of *who they are not* and *what they reject*. A liberal may thus “rightfully criticize the distribution of wealth and of income in America or Britain today as grossly and substantially unjust”. This “is done in the light of a particular conception of distributive justice, which is part of a whole moral outlook and a particular conception of the good”. But “we will expect opposition from conservatives who have another conception of justice that ... is part of their conception of good, stressing property rights and the autonomy of individuals” (Hampshire, 2000, p. 160). This, I indicated, was also the case in the 2010 Coalition: both parties appealed to similar moral principles but each conceptualized these in different, incompatible ways.

As long as political practitioners are affiliated with conflicting traditions, have different life stories and experiences, conflict, competition for power and antagonisms – within and between communities – cannot be expected to cease neither theory nor in practice. The point here is that the DH thesis misconceives compromise and betrayal and underplays their ubiquity in politics because it misconceives pluralism and conflict – both in individual and societal political ethics. The DH thesis’ ‘static’ flavour – its failure to grapple the distinctiveness of political integrity – is partially sustained by a picture of societal harmony which is implausible. By virtue of their static conception of conflict – their tendency to cast that conflict in terms of abstract, universal consequentialist or deontological principles – DH theorists make little room for the recognition that politicians are members of a particular tradition; and that their substantive interests and values may conflict with those of their interlocutors; they misconstrue the messy domain in which politicians operate and cannot thus account for the enduring compromises, betrayals, deceptions and dirt of everyday, democratic politics. This point is glimpsed by Allen who notes that the tendency to focus on a single, grand moral sacrifice distorts democratic politics: it displaces the recognition that democratic politics requires on-going, “quotidian sacrifices” (2004: 39).

Compromise, Betrayal and Political Integrity

My claim that compromise is bound to be ubiquitous in politics and that a compromising disposition constitutes an integral aspect of political integrity is couched on my suggestion politics is a distinct practice and way of life, with its own peculiar demands and standards of excellence. Democratic politics involves a struggle to secure a modicum of order and security, to ascend to power and remain it, to turn power into authority and to achieve certain more substantive goods, values and policy outcomes which stem from one’s particular tradition or party without reproducing a reign of terror (c.f. Tillyris, 2015a; 2015b; 2015c; see also Philp, 2007; Williams, 2002). Making sense of political integrity and virtue also entails taking the context in which democratic politicians operate seriously – a context ridden with competing traditions, each with its own conflicting substantive aspirations and values. Leading a virtuous political life in this messy context by relying on one’s “good arms” is impossible; “good friends” are also necessary¹⁰ (Machiavelli, 1998; 1996; Grant, 1997, p. 20). One is cut out of politics if one is vested with the innocent belief that one is self-sufficient or that conflict and competition for power are not perpetual features of it. Political experience and virtue, I gestured, entails a capacity to realize what is possible under the circumstances, to satisfy certain distinctively political goods by dexterously exploiting both conflict and the dependencies in which one is enmeshed in. The satisfaction of certain political goods then often requires building useful political relationships, not just with the demos but also, in certain instances, with one’s rivals – individuals who are not affiliated with one’s tradition or party and who do not share one’s substantive aspirations and values. Given that societal harmony is inconceivable and that political antagonisms are ineliminable the cooperation of one’s rivals cannot be seen as forthcoming. Nor is it possible if each party is unwilling to trim and betray some of its values and commitments.

Herein emerges the paradox of compromise: whilst commitment to a set of principles entails commitment to seeing them realized, in politics it also means betraying them (Luban, 1985). To re-iterate, an uncompromising disposition, whilst morally admirable is not a political virtue. “A successful politician”, Hampshire remarks, “is always rather loose in his think, flexible, not bound by principles or by or by theories, not bound even by his own intentions” (1989, p. 163). An uncompromising disposition, in contrast, is characterized by moral rigidity – an obsession with purity, an attempt to eradicate conflict and any sort of intermingling with others which

pollutes that which must remain pure. “Shit”, Margalit remarks, “is the negation of the pure”. To seek to extirpate oneself from compromise and betrayal is to “crave life without shit” (2012, p. 157). The problem, however, is that dependence and conflict are inescapable features of politics. So, too, are compromise and betrayal. Those who find compromise and betrayal intolerable, who concede nothing to others who espouse opposing conceptions of the good and values, are characterized by a dogmatic inflexibility which is unsuited for politics. The quest for salvation and purity – be it in the afterlife or in one’s estimate of oneself – and the unswerving commitment to one’s conscience and substantive moral principles, might come at the “expense of leaving the rest of us in a dirty situation”; it might also find expression in an “attempt to clean up us and the rest of the world whatever the dirtiness of the cost. In both cases, heaven is purchased at a terrifying price – be it of allowing the rest of us to go to hell or of creating a hell on earth to save us all” (Bellamy, 2010, p. 417). At its worst, then, an uncompromising disposition might spill into a violent, Robespierrian will to impose one’s principles come what may and jeopardize political stability, security and order – goods which politics should shelter¹⁸.

This is not to suggest that cruelty is unnecessary in politics altogether – especially when politicians are confronted with public agents who refuse to compromise and threaten stability. My point is that the exhibition of perpetual brutality for the sake of utopian, unrealizable ideals at the expense of politics is unlikely to allow for a stable rule and to help one to remain in power. Nor, by implication, is it capable of sustaining political relationships or a virtuous political life. To act with boundless cruelty is to ignore some of the goods which politics should safeguard. Further, *pace* Margalit, it does not follow that compromises “that perpetuate cruelty” should never be struck (2012, p. 2). To suggest otherwise would push us back to the moralism I seek to reject. For, when the survival of the community is threatened forging relationships with cruel regimes might be necessary. This point is captured by an example which is used by Margalit (2012) and which contradicts his basic principle: on June 1941, Churchill stated that Hitler’s plan to attack Russia relied on right-wing sympathies in Britain not to interfere. But Hitler’s expectations, he added, were wrong: Britain would aid Russia. His remark invited an expression of dissent from his secretary, who invoked the typical charges raised against compromise: a deal with Stalin would render Churchill inconsistent; it would be a pact with injustice and a betrayal of one’s principles. Churchill acknowledged this: “No one has been a more consistent opponent of Communism than I have for the last twenty years. I will unsay no word that I have spoken about it”. Yet, “all this fades away before the spectacle which is now unfolding” (1986, p. 332). Hitler posed an imminent threat to the community Churchill was responsible for. Despite his commitment against communism, which he despised partly because of its cruelty, Churchill realized that he was confronted with an even larger cruelty: defeating evil requires a pact with evil. This need not suggest that there should be no limits as to when politicians should compromise. But, *pace* Margalit, the point here is that we should, to use Williams’s (2006) words, acknowledge ‘the limits of philosophy’: it is impossible and philosophically asinine to determine *a priori* what the precise limits of when politicians should compromise should be. Instead of attempting to justify certain universal, absolute moral principles *in abstracto* of the context in which politicians operate and the circumstances they are confronted with, the best we can do is to acknowledge that political virtue and experience entails an acute sensitivity to the demands of politics and the specifics of each circumstance – a capacity to suspend some of

¹⁸ For an account of Robespierre’s ‘terror of virtue’ see Arendt (1990).

one's principles and values in practice. An innocent individual might shut his eyes to the grubbiness and complex requirements of politics but, for a politician, to reject compromise based on a supposedly absolute principle whilst one's community is threatened with destruction would be politically irresponsible. A refusal to compromise *in abstracto* of the concrete circumstances of politics would be uncongenial to the messy realities of politics and the inevitable conflicts this way of life involves. It would also jeopardize some of the ends and goods a virtuous politics should serve.

This insight need not emerge only from such drastic cases. It can be illustrated by considering our everyday democratic politics where an uncompromising disposition typically entails an unwillingness to negotiate. Whilst this may not jeopardize stability, one wonders whether an uncompromising disposition is politically virtuous. Since ordinary politics is characterized by a plurality of traditions and represents conflicting and incommensurable viewpoints, a dogmatic refusal compromise with one's rivals on policy formation or legislation entails the entire abandonment of any hope of realizing some of one's principles. This follows from the paradox mentioned above: refusing to betray some of one's principles and commitments entails betraying them altogether. It would also mean to abandon the hope of altering the *status quo*. Consider the 1986 Tax Reform Act (TRA) in the US. Democrats – controlling the Congress – and Republicans – holding the presidency under Reagan – agreed that tax reform was necessary but interpreted the substance of such reform in incompatible ways (Pollack, 1990). The TRA was “an uneasy marriage”: it embodied incommensurable substantive principles and values, fuelled by each side's distinctive conception of justice and the good (Graetz, 2007, p. 70). The “Democrats wanted to end loopholes for special interests and the wealthy but they also agreed to radically lower the top tax rate”; the Republicans “wanted to lower marginal tax rates but they also agreed to lower ... marginal tax reductions which resulted in the wealthy contributing a higher percentage of income-tax revenues than they previously had done” (Gutmann & Thompson, 2010, p. 1126). Both sides betrayed some of their values – values which fuelled their aspiration for reform in the first place – but this was a ‘lesser evil’ compared to a refusal to compromise *in toto*: an uncompromising disposition would have meant the *complete* abandonment of both parties' principles as well as of any hope for reform altogether. But an uncompromising disposition might also lead to the betrayal of additional political goods: rising to power. This is captured in McLean's (2012) analysis of the 2010 Coalition. Refusing to compromise was open to both parties: the two largest parties – the Conservatives or Labour – could form a minority government with sufficient passive support to get their budget approved. This, however, would have left the Liberal Democrats out of office, with limited capacity to advance *some* of their pledges. Further, the party forming a minority government would be handicapped. Minority governments have historically proven to be short-lived and unsuccessful – especially amidst economic crises (McLean, 2012). Either way, each party's rigid adherence to its principles and pre-election commitments would preclude the attainment of some of the goods of politics.

Conclusion

Taking my cue from Machiavelli's (1998) recognition that there exists a rift between a morally admirable and a virtuous political life, I argued that: i) compromise is politically expedient but not necessarily morally admirable; ii) a willingness to compromise, whilst uncongenial to moral integrity, constitutes an essential part of political integrity. The rift between a morally admirable and a virtuous political life is partly premised on the

recognition that societal conflict is perpetual To repeat, political integrity is “integrity of the trimmer” and is not akin to moral integrity or the consistency of a saint (Hollis, 1982, p. 397). It is intertwined with a capacity ‘to keep dancing’ amidst conflict and dependence; it involves the recognition that in politics one’s choices are often the lesser of two evils – one’s dependency on others who share neither one’s aspirations or interests is such that one can be free neither from seeking an uneasy conciliation of competing, incombinate claims nor from betrayal and wrongdoing. From the perspective of a theory of justice or moral integrity, political integrity amounts to no integrity at all. This conviction sits neatly with the negative view of compromise and the DH thesis but is misplaced: it misconstrues the messiness of politics and the distinctiveness of political integrity.

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