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Dirty Hands and Suffering

Demetris Tillyris

Abstract: *Contra* the prevalent way of thinking about the dirty-hands problem, this article suggests that dirty hands need not necessarily entail suffering and that a politician who does not suffer for his dirty-handed acts should not be cast as a bad politician. In so doing, the article: (i) argues that the connection between DH and suffering is unsatisfactorily totalising and rests on a contentious conception of conflict as a dysfunction and (ii) develops an alternative account of the good dirty-handed politician, which is associated with what proponents of the prevalent view of the problem find impossible: calm acceptance of – even indulgence in – one’s dirt. This recognition has important implications for our contemporary culture of contrition and for the way we evaluate the characters of our politicians.

Keywords: dirty hands, moral conflict, public ethics, suffering, value pluralism

Media coverage of politics, David Walker and Nicholas Jones observe, is united by its tendency to keep reminding us that our politicians are ‘lying bastards’ (2004: 7). Such attitudes are a persistent finding of numerous opinion polls (Hatier 2012; Hay 2007) and reflect, what Michael Walzer (1973: 162) terms, ‘the conventional wisdom that politicians are ... morally worse, than the rest of us’. This view, Walzer maintains, should not be merely explained with reference to cases of banal sleaze but should be traced to a more disquieting concern: the problem of dirty hands (DH) – ‘a central feature of political life’ that ‘arises ... systematically and frequently’ and

questions ‘the coherence and harmony of the moral universe’ and the ‘ease ... of living a moral life’ in politics (1973: 161–162).

The DH problem reveals the existence of a rupture between moral and political action and of a connection between political expedience and the capacity to engage in, authorise or tolerate the shabby, the shoddy and the morally disagreeable, if not the outright abominable. The moral politician is known ‘by his dirty hands’: ‘If he were a moral man and nothing else, his hands would not be dirty’, but he would ‘fail to measure up to the duties of his office’ (Walzer 1973: 161–168). Whilst a small forest has been sacrificed at the altar of making sense of the DH problem – for example, on whether it might extend beyond the realm of professional politics (de Wijze 1994, 2005; Gowans 2001; Stocker 1990) – this article focuses on a somewhat different issue. I wish to concentrate on the DH problem in politics that is seen as special and enduring and, in doing so, to explore the insufficiently problematised question of what the inner life of the dirty-handed politician should be.

A breezy reading of the DH literature reveals that this question invites a pithy answer – one that dovetails with, what Tony Judt (2004) terms, our contemporary ‘cult of contrition’: there exists a link between DH and pain. The squabbles amongst DH theorists aside, DH theorists agree that the DH politician will and should suffer; she should be consumed with what has been termed *anguish* (Stocker 1990; van Fraassen 1990; Walzer 1973), guilt (Cunningham 1992; Dovi 2005; Gowans 2001; van Fraassen 1973; Walzer 1973), regret (Philp 2007; van Fraassen 1973), disquiet (Williams 1981), remorse (Cunningham 1992), or tragic remorse (de Wijze 2005). There are, DH theorists emphasise, at least two reasons for this. First, such suffering is perceived as ‘a crucial feature of our moral life’ (Walzer 1973: 171) and casts doubt on the value-monist vision of harmony as well as the psychologically impoverished self propounded by our dominant moral

theories. ‘A DH analysis’, Stephen de Wijze notes, ‘provides a more plausible characterization of our moral reality’ approaches that postulate that moral conflicts are mathematical puzzles begging for a perfect, rational solution – a solution without remainder. Hence, our feelings of ‘guilt’ are not ‘a vestige of primitive moral sensibility’ but, rather, testament to the fragmentation of morality (de Wijze 2005: 458). The second reason is that suffering constitutes the appropriate way that responsible politicians should respond to the problem; the politician Walzer (1973: 166–168) emphasises ‘will feel guilty ... That is what it means to have dirty hands’, for, ‘his guilt is evidence ... that he is not too good for politics but that his good enough’. ‘The issue of regret’, Philp (2007: 92–93) adds, ‘is important’: whilst ‘what needs to be done should be done’, the experience of regret entails acknowledgement of the ‘costs of doing so’. Or, in Williams’s (1981: 63) words, ‘disquiet ... embodies a sensibility to moral costs’ and constitutes ‘an essential obstacle against the happy acceptance of the intolerable’. Suffering is thus perceived as a necessary condition of DH and of good politicians. We should be wary of politicians who get DH without batting an eye or, worse, who acquiesce to or glorify their immoralities. Such attitudes entail a worrisome refusal to accept that in certain cases one’s actions, though necessary, are not devoid of wrongdoing and are seen as the hallmark of those who lack moral and political seriousness – persons who are unfit to rule (de Wijze 2005; Kis 2008). Hence, what one might term, following Derek Edyvane (2011a), the ‘no pain, no gain hypothesis’: good politicians should anguish over the dilemmas they face and repent their dirty-handed acts.

But herein lies the problem: despite or perhaps because of the connection between DH and suffering, the DH problem *and* the aspiration of being ruled by virtuous politicians are rendered unstable and unsustainable. If one takes seriously the suggestion that DH constitutes a pervasive aspect of politics, the politician’s initial awareness of the moral costs of her transgressions –

crystallised by her suffering – might collapse into acquiesce, indifference or acceptance. The ‘danger politicians face’, Janos Kis (2008: 199) suggests, is ‘that of progressively losing the capacity to perceive the moral awkwardness of their dirty handed acts ... of becoming more and more indifferent towards the problem of dirty hands’. Failure to appreciate the costs associated with one’s dirty-handed acts might also erode one’s capacity to perceive the thin line between necessary and unnecessary immoralities – between DH and sleaze. Politicians who fail to acknowledge the moral costs associated with the former might be less inhibited from engaging in the latter. Alternatively, awareness that DH and the suffering that accompanies that phenomenon are an inescapable feature of politics might provoke political exodus. George Fletcher’s remark on the instability of toleration is suggestive: the trouble with toleration, he notes, is that the tolerant ‘suffer’ and that ‘those who suffer prefer an easier way’ (1996: 159). The idea of an individual who cannot abide by the tension, compromises and dirt of politics and who seeks to keep his hands clean or evade politics altogether is hardly unfamiliar. It does not just fuel the innocent platitude ‘I don’t do politics’ but is also encapsulated in Tim Farron’s resignation speech as a liberal democrat leader: ‘I have found myself torn between living as a faithful Christian and serving as a political leader’, Farron says despairingly. ‘To be a political leader and ... to hold faithfully to the Bible’s teaching, has felt impossible’ (Elgot and Stewart 2017).

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The DH problem yields a set of depressing conclusions: because DH is a pervasive feature of politics, good politicians and good persons might become towards their dirt and lose sight of their immoralities; alternatively, because politics entails dirt and suffering, these individuals might abdicate their political responsibility and divest themselves of public office. DH scholars address this problem in two different ways. On the one hand, there are those who espouse what Walzer (1973) terms the Protestant model, which he attributes to Max Weber. This model concedes

that DH and the tension between morality and politics are irresolvable and that the best that we can hope for is to be ruled by ‘suffering servants’ – tragic heroes who surrender themselves ‘to the demon of politics’ and do what they must with ‘a heavy heart’ (Walzer 1973: 177; see also Cunningham 1992; Gowans 2001; Philp 2007; Stocker 1990). As Williams (1981: 62) writes, the ‘hope’ is ‘to find some politicians’ who ‘are reluctant and disinclined to do the morally disagreeable when it is really necessary’, who ‘have much chance of not doing it when it is not necessary’. Nobody said that a life of politics would be easy or pain-free. Politics is an arena that reminds us, to use Williams’s (2008: 166) words, that ‘the world was not made for us, or we for the world’.

On the other hand, there are those who embrace what Walzer terms the Catholic model, who accept the ‘great value of the hero’s suffering’ but postulate that the tension between morality and politics need not be irresolvable *in toto*. ‘We don’t want to be ruled by men who have lost their souls’, Walzer emphasises. Hence, ‘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: 177–178; see also de Wijze 2013). On this model, the DH problem, the rift between politics and morality, is transient, ultimately resolvable via certain cathartic rituals. The precise details of the positions held by proponents of the Catholic and Protestant models are not important. What is important to note is that whilst such models seem radically different – the Catholic model optimistically holds that DH and the tension between politics and morality need not be perpetual and irresolvable, while the Protestant model is pessimistically resigned to see politicians plunged in a life of immorality and pain – they both espouse the ‘no pain, no gain’ hypothesis.

The trouble with the Catholic model seems clear. In the background of that model, I suggested elsewhere, lurks a ‘static’ account of DH – a tendency to see the rift between morality and politics as a momentary, surmountable episode that disrupts the normality of harmony – which displaces the insight that DH is a systematic feature of politics and collapses into the value-monism it rails against (see Tillyris 2015). Yet, whilst I agree with proponents of the Protestant model that politics does not provide a fertile ground for the salvation of one’s soul, however it is construed, I wish to challenge both the Catholic and the Protestant models. Both models embark on the commendable quest to respond to the apparent unsustainability of DH but do so by taking for granted the ‘no pain, no gain hypothesis’, which is, I argue, problematic. Specifically, I suggest that: (i) DH need not entail suffering and that it can be less unstable and precarious than assumed and (ii) a politician who does not suffer for his dirty-handed acts need not be a bad politician.

The discussion proceeds as follows. In the first section, I elaborate on ‘the no pain, no gain’ hypothesis, at the background of which, I suggest, lurks an affinity between DH and moral schizophrenia. In the ensuing two sections, I shall salvage the DH problem from its affinity with schizophrenia by casting doubt on the reasons offered by proponents of the Protestant and Catholic models in support for that affinity and by developing an alternative account of the good dirty-handed politician, which is associated with what proponents of the ‘no pain, no gain’ hypothesis find impossible: calm acceptance of – even indulgence in – one’s dirt. The connection between DH and suffering, I argue, seems unsatisfactorily totalising and rests on a contentious conception of internal conflict as a dysfunction. It is not implausible for an individual to acquiesce to and even be vitalised by the tension and dirty-handed acts that politics entails *and* lead a virtuous political life. This recognition, I suggest, has important implications for the way we evaluate the characters of our politicians.

Note that I do not wish to argue that good politicians should not experience conflict or fail to acknowledge the costs associated with their dirty-handed acts. Whilst we might have to abandon the aspiration of being ruled by morally good or decent persons, I wish to challenge the prevalent conviction that *suffering* is a necessary condition of DH and essential a quality of a good politician.

Dirty Hands and Schizophrenia

The DH problem entails ‘a painful process that forces a man to weigh the wrong he is willing to do in order to do right and that leaves pain behind, and should do so, even after the decision has been made’ (Walzer 1973: 174). At the core of the problem lies the idea that in certain tragic circumstances, politicians are torn by an irresolvable conflict between two incompatible courses of action and are compelled to accept, sanction or endorse actions, policies and values they find morally unacceptable or disagreeable. This idea is important, as it serves to distinguish dirty-handed acts from pure corruption. Unlike the latter, which entail failure to adopt a readily available and morally right avenue and are the *modus operandi* of the purely wicked, in DH situations, the agent is incapable of acting in a *tout court* morally right manner because no such an option is *a priori* available.

‘The special intrigue of dirty hands’, Anthony Cunningham (1992: 240) writes, ‘revolves around the idea that a morally sticky situation is thrust upon us and threatens our innocence through no fault of our own’. The DH problem is striking as it confronts ‘morally innocent’ (de Wijze 2012; Gowans 2001; Stocker 1990; Walzer 1973), good and moral (de Wijze 2005; Stocker 1990), or decent persons (Williams 1981). The individual confronted with the problem, Walzer (1973: 165) explains, is a person ‘with principles’ and ‘a history of adhering to those principles’. The wrongdoing that DH entails, then, occurs ‘within a harness of necessity’ (de Wijze 2005: 468); it

does not stem from immoral impulses but is, in a way, forced upon the agents who find themselves impaled on the horns of a momentous conflict – between the demands of politics and the dictates of conscience or morality. As Cristina Roadevin writes in *Forgiving Dirty Hands*, dirty-handed politicians lack ‘a real choice’ – if ‘the agent had another real choice, she wouldn’t have violated the norm’. *Ergo* Philp’s point on the appropriateness of regret: the politician’s ‘regret is not self-indulgent – it is their bad luck that they faced a particular situation, and so had to act in ways that ... are repugnant to them’ (2007: 93)

Morally good and innocent individuals thus get their hands dirty because it is their *political duty* to do so, not because they *want to* (certainly not because getting their hands dirty is what they most aspire to do). Yet, whilst this insight provides an overriding or, what de Wijze (1994) and Stocker (1990) term, an *action-guiding prescription* to get one’s hands dirty – to commit moral transgressions for political reasons – it does not render the problem sustainable or stable. To establish an action-guiding prescription that a morally good person acts in a specific way need not entail that such an individual would, in fact, be capable of doing so (see Shue 2009). Whilst morally good, innocent individuals might have an overriding political reason to get their hands dirty, they might be inclined to do otherwise and keep their hands clean. This much also follows from the point I registered in the introduction: there is an affinity between DH, reluctance and suffering, and political responsibility. If an individual *wants* to get her hands dirty in a situation whereby the demands of politics and conscience collide or is nonchalant about the conflict with which she is plagued and the prospect of acting immorally, that situation would not qualify as a *genuine* case of DH; such an individual’s attitude would bespeak of her lack of moral compass and political responsibility.

A genuine case of DH therefore seems to require a tension between one's reasons or justifications and one's motives and aspirations. Simply put, the DH problem entails an internal state of moral schizophrenia (see Parrish 2008: 12). Moral schizophrenia, Michael Stocker (1976: 454) explains, occurs when there exists 'a split between one's motives and reasons' and a corresponding failure 'to be moved by what one values – what one believes good, nice, right, beautiful and so on' – or, in reverse, 'being moved to do what one believes bad, harmful, ugly, and abasing'. This condition – one manifestation of which is 'guilt' – 'bespeaks malady of the spirit' and is detrimental to the good life: 'we should be moved by our major values and we should value what our motives seek, should, that is, if we are to lead a good life ... harmony is a mark of the good life' (Stocker 1976: 454). What is paradoxical of the DH problem, then, is that getting one's hands dirty entails contravening what one values the most or, in reverse, of valuing most what one is not disposed to. This is glimpsed by Michael Slote (1976: 97–100), who notes that the DH problem constitutes a species of 'admirable immorality' and requires a 'moral stomach' – the 'ability to overcome personal aversion and the pangs of conscience' and to suspend one's deeply held principles in action. Stocker's (1976: 455) pessimistic answer to the question of 'what sort of life would people have who did their duties but never really wanted to?' is echoed by DH scholars: that life would be ridden with suffering and would be inimical to the good life *period* (as per the Catholic model) or, that it would be ridden with suffering and would be incompatible with the good life insofar as the ideal of cathartic punishment remains difficult to implement (as per the Protestant model; see Walzer 1973: 179). The trouble is that if this picture is correct, then innocent, morally good or decent individuals might opt for less painful life – a life that would be hardly politically virtuous and/or apolitical *in toto* (i.e., by gradually acquiescing to their dirt and immoralities, by refraining from getting their hands dirty when necessary or by evading politics).

Thus far, I explored the ‘no pain, no gain’ hypothesis that lurks in the background of the prevalent conception of DH by developing an account of the internal state of the dirty-handed agent as a form of schizophrenia – a rift between one’s motives and reasons. DH scholars typically conceive of the problem as confronting innocent, morally good or decent persons who are *compelled* by their sense of political *duty* to dirty their hands. The tension between one’s motives (leading a morally good life and honouring one’s cherished commitments) and one’s reasons (fulfilling one’s political duty) and the corresponding betrayal of the former is thus bound to be deeply traumatic. Yet the image of the good politician that is fuelled by the ‘no pain, no gain’ hypothesis seems incomplete, if not inaccurate. We are invited to conceive of the good politician as akin to Orestes’s torment by the Erinyes in Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*, afflicted by suffering as she is forced to reluctantly violate her principles. Whilst there exist instances in which a reaction of this sort might be appropriate, to suggest that suffering is a feature of *our* moral experience and of good politicians as such is to displace a different but hardly uncommon picture of the good dirty-handed politician – a picture associated with calm acceptance and enjoyment of the dirt that politics entails. It is to the exploration of that picture and its philosophical underpinnings I turn.

Leading a Political Life: Dirty Hands and Political Integrity

A classic example of the serene and impassioned dirty-handed politician is found in Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Les Mains Sales* – the play from which the idea of ‘dirty hands’ derives (de Wijze 2005; Stocker 1990; Walzer 1973). The much-quoted but superficially acknowledged exchange between the innocent Hugo and Hoederer, the leader of the ‘underground’ communist party, captures that picture:

Hugo: I never lie to my comrades ...

Hoederer: I'll lie when I must ... How you cling to your purity, young man! How afraid you are to soil your hands! All right, stay pure! What good will it do? Why did you join us? Purity is an idea for a yogi or a monk ... To do nothing, to remain motionless, arms at your sides, wearing kid gloves. Well, I have dirty hands. Right up to the elbows. I've plunged them in filth and blood. But what do you hope? Do you think you can govern innocently? (Sartre 1955: 223–224)

Hoederer is not, as DH theorists rightly suggest, a simple-minded monist who craves some sort of harmony amongst conflicting values. As a paradigm example of a dirty-handed politician, Hoederer neither shuts his eyes to the grubbiness of politics nor is he oblivious to the dirt on his hands – the moral costs that political life entails. Yet, Hoederer's internal state shares little with the picture of the dirty-handed politician painted by DH scholars – the tragic individual who is in a state of torment over the irresolvable conflicts with which he is plagued. Hoederer's attitude towards his dirt and his fervent defence of the messiness of politics does not appear to constitute an expression of moral schizophrenia. To label Hoederer – who *calmly* and *coldly* notes that in politics 'one lies when one must' and who *proudly* asserts that he has 'plunged his hands, right up to the elbows, in filth and blood' as a 'suffering servant' – would be a mistake. For, Hoederer, *qua* dirty-handed political agent, is moved to do that which he has *reason* to do – that which he *wants* to do. Hoederer is not schizophrenic, as he does not contravene what he values the most; his motives and reasons seem to be in harmony: his willingness to carry out his political duties is not a product of reluctance or internal struggle but rather stems from an appreciation of the distinctive demands of politics and sits *alongside* his acknowledgement of the ineluctable immoralities that politics entails and his willingness to engage in these when necessary.

Unlike Hugo and the schizophrenic agent painted by DH scholars, Hoederer is not an innocent, morally good or decent individual thrown into the dreary world of politics – a world that threatens that which he craves the most (moral purity and salvation, the realisation of his substantive moral principles) – and who, once confronted with the prospect of dirtying his hands, his immediate reaction is suffering, akin to an individual struck by an unanticipated misfortune or ‘bad luck’, in Philp’s (2007: 93) words. Rather, Hoederer’s endeavour to fulfil his political duty and to unrepentantly dirty his hands in the process stems from his appreciation that a life of politics – the life that he has chosen to lead – requires its practitioners to subscribe to distinct qualities of character and standards of excellence – qualities of character and standards of excellence that stem from *within* the grubby, conflict-ridden domain of politics and are at odds with those that are conducive to a morally innocent or decent a way of life. To be sure, innocence, moral purity and unflinching loyalty to one’s moral principles and aspirations are not worthless *in toto*. Such qualities, Hoederer tells Hugo, are morally admirable and definitive of moral integrity – they are integral to the life of a ‘yogi’ or a ‘monk’ – but they are not political virtues. They are vices when displayed by those who occupy political positions and antithetical to political integrity. Unlike moral integrity, which resembles ‘a block of marble’, political integrity resembles ‘a swarm of bees’ and is akin to the integrity of a ‘burglar who is ready to change direction when he runs up against an obstacle in the dark’ (Hampshire 1989a: 163, 1993a). Hoederer’s engagement in politics, then, is fuelled by the disquieting recognition that Berlin’s (1980) Machiavelli forces upon us: that one can either save one’s soul and lead a life of moral integrity and innocence or virtuously engage in politics, but one *cannot* both at once – that if you object to the qualities of character and actions intrinsic to a virtuous political life, you are ‘you are perfectly entitled to lead a morally good life, be a ... monk. But ... you must not make yourself responsible for the lives of others ...;

you must expect to be ignored or destroyed' (Berlin 1980: 57; see also Mendus 1988; Morgenbesser and Lieberson 1991).

At the core of the Hoedererian conception of the good dirty-handed politician lies an idiosyncratic account of value pluralism that cuts deeper than what a large portion of the literature of DH allows: the DH problem – the rift between politics and morality – does not just entail an insurmountable conflict between incompatible *values* or *courses of action* – a tension between the *action-guiding* demands of moral conscience and of political duty that confronts morally good or innocent individuals. Rather, the rift between morality and politics entails an irreconcilable tension between 'entire systems of value' or 'worlds' (Berlin 1980: 74, 59; my emphasis), a conflict between two radically 'different ways of life' (Hampshire 1989a: 177), each with its own distinct standards of excellence and qualities of character. In Hampshire's (1989a: 177) words,

moral innocence and purity are incompatible with the effective exercise of political power ... two conceptions of virtue and of responsible action, attached to two very different ways of life, have to be recognised ... as a duality that persists in history ... The virtues of innocence ... realise conceptions of the good which can inspire strong emotions and great admiration: absolute integrity ... The virtues of experience can equally inspire strong emotions and great admiration: tenacity and resolution, courage in the face of risk, intelligence, ... leadership.

The point here, Sue Mendus explains, is that 'since it is impossible to reconcile all values, when we decide in favour of one world against another it is certain that we will lose something of value'. As such, '[i]n choosing the life of religious obedience one forfeits the possibility of cultivating the virtues associated with the life of politics (Mendus 2009: 88). In reverse, in choosing a life of politics, one forfeits the possibility of cultivating certain qualities of character associated with a

morally admirable life – the hope of salvation, the innocence, moral purity and the simple-minded moral consistency of the saint. And, in choosing politics, one ‘must suppress his private qualms’ (Berlin 1980: 59). For,

Whoever has chosen to make an omelette cannot do so without breaking eggs...
To fumble, to retreat, to be overcome by scruples, is to betray your chosen cause
... to stop half-way because of personal qualms, or some rule unrelated to your art
... is a sign of muddle and weakness and will always give you the worst of both
worlds. (Berlin 1980: 58–59)

Indeed, Berlin (1980: 60–75) notes, it is those innocent souls – individuals like Hugo or the schizophrenic DH agent – who, unaware of the realities of politics, ‘are not prepared to abandon either course’ and ‘assume that the two incompatible lives are in fact ... reconcilable’, for whom the conflicts and dirt that politics entails appear ‘disastrous’ and will ‘necessarily’ be ‘extreme’ and ‘agonising’. For politicians like Hoederer – individuals prepared to dirty their hands not out of compulsion but out of appreciation of the realities of politics – there is no agony: such individuals have chosen politics, and ‘having chosen’, in Berlin’s (1980: 59) words, they do ‘not look back’.

The politician who takes the claims of politics seriously, then, should ‘know in advance that politics will produce these sorts of dilemma’ and should be prepared to dirty her hands. For, ‘in choosing politics’, she ‘has chosen a life which will predictably bring these [irreconcilable] conflicts with it’ (Mendus 1988: 340–343). But such knowledge, I gestured, is lacking in Hugo and the innocent individual painted by DH scholars. For such knowledge is intertwined with the disposition of experience – the *sine qua non* of political virtue and the antithesis of innocence. ‘The idea of experience’, Hampshire (1989a: 170) writes, ‘is the idea of guilty knowledge, of the

expectation of unavoidable squalor and imperfection, of ... mixed results, of half success and half failure'. Note that *guilty knowledge* should not be conflated with *guilty feelings*. A person of experience, Hampshire (1989a: 170) emphasises, 'is clear-headed, and not divided in mind, about their [political] obligations' and should 'be prepared for the occurrence of an uncontrollable conflict of duties which seem to exclude the possibility of a decent outcome'. The idea of guilty knowledge, then – *qua* aspect of political experience – involves the recognition that in politics one's 'usual choice will be the lesser of two evils' and an acknowledgement of the costs that one's choices entail; it does not entail suffering that is symptomatic of innocence and political impotence (Hampshire 1989a: 170). But the idea of guilty knowledge does not just entail acquiescence to one's dirt, a capacity to live with unresolved conflicts. For Hampshire talks about 'the *excitement* of political experience' – the '*delight* in the exercise of political skills ... the calculation of probable outcomes' and the '*passion* of political intrigue and the complexities of political calculation' – which those who lead a political life 'find *irresistible*' (1989a: 170, 176, my emphasis).

At this point, I should emphasise three issues. First, to say that political life entails radically different demands and standards of excellence to those conducive to a morally admirable way of life is not to say that those who opt for the former renounce their substantive moral principles and aspirations *in toto*; it is, rather, to say that their *fidelity lies in politics* – the distinctive goods that politics should shelter – as opposed to individual salvation – the single-minded pursuit of the dictates of conscience. The decision to lead a political life – to heed, accept and absorb its distinctive demands and standards – constitutes an expression of Machiavelli's famous 'I love my country more than my own soul', which, for Arendt, is a variation of: 'I love the world and its future more than ... myself':

The question ... was ... whether one was capable of loving the world more than one's own self. And this decision indeed has always been the crucial decision for all who devoted their lives to politics. Most of Machiavelli's arguments against religion are directed against those who love themselves, namely their own salvation, more than the world. (Arendt 1965: 50, 290)

Arendt's appropriation of Machiavelli is idiosyncratic, and it is not my intention to defend it here. What is important to note, though, is that whilst virtuous political practice is not incompatible with a quest to realise *someone's* substantive moral principles and aspirations; that quest is tethered by a recognition that forms part of political experience – that the pursuit and realisation of such principles and aspirations in the public realm is conditioned by and subservient to the messiness and distinct demands of politics (i.e., protection against the perennial evils of injustice and cruelty, the struggle to secure a modicum of order and security, to ascend to power and to transform power to authority amidst a chaotic context marked by an irreducible plurality of different, incompatible moral aspirations and interests [Berlin 1980, 1990; Hampshire 1989a]) and is bound to be partial, shabby and compromised, even under the most ideal of circumstances.

Secondly, because – or insofar as – one's fidelity lies in politics – or, in Arendtian terms, the world – acquiescence to or fascination for the murkiness of political life need not entail collapse into political irresponsibility or a lack of sensibility to moral costs. On this account, political irresponsibility is a manifestation not of political experience but of innocence and purity. Such qualities are not merely passive, as DH scholars maintain; they are not just acted upon or await to be tragically tainted upon one's confrontation with a dilemma but rather possess an active property: they can be responsible political tragedy. An unswerving commitment to one's conscience, one's substantive aspirations – 'though the heavens fall' – might not just move one to keep one's hands

clean in DH scenarios and indirectly compromise the goods that politics should shelter; rather, the quest for salvation and purity might directly form ‘a recipe for bloodshed’ (Berlin 1990: 19). It might move one to impose one’s moral aspirations come-what-may – an endeavour to ‘bend reality’ – the plurality of different, incompatible ways of life and traditions that comprise the fabric of public life – ‘into conformity with ... [one’s] will’, to create hell on earth by reducing reality to a ‘Procrustean bed of some rigid dogma’ and imperilling order and security, goods that politics should shelter (Berlin 1990: 19, 1999: 77). This is the lesson that Sartre’s play forces upon us. As suggested, whilst this is the play from which the DH problem takes its name, Sartre’s insights are superficially acknowledged by DH scholars. To say that Hoederer merely attempts to convince Hugo to act immorally and taint his innocence would be misleading. Hugo is not unwilling to get his hands bloody: ‘I’m not afraid of blood ... the party has one program: the realization of a socialist economy, and one method of achieving it: class struggle’. Hoederer’s endeavour to secure a modicum of stability and security by compromising with its political rivals and betraying some of the party’s substantive aspirations is, for Hugo, impossible to contemplate; class collaboration would ‘contaminate’ that which must be kept pure (Sartre 1955: 218–219, 214–215). Unlike Hoederer, Hugo’s preparedness to act immorally is apolitical: it constitutes a vehicle via which his quest for purity and salvation can be enacted in public life at the *expense* of the aforementioned political goods. In short, Hugo’s fidelity lies not in politics but in a disastrous, extra-terrestrial vision dictated by conscience: a vision of a perfectly harmonious, pure society, where ‘all our ideas and only these are victorious’ (Sartre 1955: 217). Hoederer’s riposte to Hugo’s innocence is suggestive: ‘You don’t love men, Hugo. You love only principles ... you are a destroyer ... Your purity resembles death ... You don’t want to change the world; you want to blow it up’ (Sartre 1955: 220).

Thirdly, the picture of the dirty-handed politician whose fidelity lies in politics and who calmly accepts and indulges oneself in its grubbiness is neither of an abstract philosophical interest nor is it merely gleaned in literary examples; rather, it is embodied in one of the paradigmatic examples of dirty-handed politicians discussed in the DH literature: Winston Churchill (see Walzer 1977). Churchill's dirty-handed acts during World War II are many – for example, the decision to let Coventry and its citizens perish for the sake of keeping the decryption of the Enigma code secret (Bellioti 2015; Hollis 1982); the pact with Stalin, whose regime he regarded as ‘cruel’ and ‘wicked’, for the sake of defeating an even crueller, far more wicked regime (Churchill 1986; Tillyris 2017); the decision to terror-bomb German cities in order to undermine the morale of the German people (Bellamy 2008, 2009; Churchill 1949: 567) – and I cannot elaborate on these here. What I wish to emphasise is that Churchill – at least the portrait of Churchill that emerges from his own memoirs and speeches and is painted by numerous biographers and historians – though cognisant of the moral costs of his choices (Churchill 1986: 332, 1949: 567; Dimpleby 2016), neither anguished nor repented for these; rather, he contemplated these ‘with a stern and tranquil gaze’ (Berlin 1949; Churchill 1949) and marshalled on with ‘a remorseless energy’ (Hastings 1979: 70), with ‘ardent spirit and resolution’ (Terraine 2010: 259), ‘fired by the conviction that could only belong to one who had faced down inner despair’ (Manchester 1983: 40–42). These attitudes are epitomised in a note to Lord Beaverbrook, the minister for War Production, in which Churchill (1949: 567) implacably discusses the necessity of terror-bombing:

When I look around to see how we can win the war I see that there is only one sure path. We have no Continental Army which can defeat the German military power. But there is one thing that will bring ... [Hitler] down ... an absolutely devastating, exterminating attack by very heavy bombers from this country upon

the Nazi homeland. We must be able to overwhelm him by this means, without which I do not see a way through.¹

Indeed, some of Churchill's contemplations echo of Hampshire's point on the 'excitement' of and 'delight' in the grubbiness of politics. 'It is impossible', Churchill writes, 'to quell the inward excitement which comes from a prolonged balancing of terrible things' (Berlin 1949; Churchill 1949). This and passionate attitude towards the dreary choices politics entails was also reflected in his speeches that 'were always public ... remote from the hesitations and stresses of introspection and private life', fuelled by an appreciation of his calling: the need to 'respond to the demands which history makes', to manoeuvre with fortitude amid 'a climate in which men do not usually like living', which demands 'a violent tension which, if it lasts, destroys all sense of normal perspective, ... and falsifies normal values to an intolerable extent' (Berlin 1949). This much is encapsulated in his 'Never Given In' speech at Harrow School in October 1941, which concluded by suggesting a modification of a verse from a song chanted in his honour by the students:

There is one word I want to alter ... It is the line: "Not less we praise in darker days". I have obtained the Head Master's permission to alter darker to sterner: "Not less we praise in sterner days" ... Do not let us speak of darker days ... These are not dark days; these are the greatest days our country has ever lived, and we must all thank God that we have been allowed ... to play a part in making these days memorable. (Churchill 1941).

That the language of 'remorse', 'guilt' and 'suffering' sits uneasily with Churchill's persona is a matter of historical record but is unsurprising. Like Hoederer, Churchill is not schizophrenic – his motives and reasons were in harmony: his impenitent willingness to embark on a journey of 'blood, toil, tears, and sweat' was sparked by an appreciation of the demands and standards of excellence

intrinsic to his way of life; it sat alongside his commitment to ‘victory at all costs ... for without victory survival is impossible’ (The Guardian 1940).

To recap, I have sketched the contours of an alternative account of the dirty-handed politician in order to salvage DH from its association with schizophrenia. On this account, the politician’s acceptance and willingness to tolerate or authorise actions or policies that entail the suspension of the dictates of conscience (her substantive moral aspirations and principles) in action is a necessary and inescapable by-product of political life – the way of life in which her allegiance lies. Though idiosyncratic, this account denies neither the existence of moral conflict nor the politician’s appreciation of the dirt and moral costs associated with her choices, notwithstanding her calm, even enthusiastic acceptance of these. Yet one might wonder whether that account takes us far enough and whether it fully resolves the problem I posed. The experienced politician’s fidelity in and appreciation of the grubbiness of politics notwithstanding, insofar as she remains sensitive to the recognition that her actions and way of life carry considerable costs, her experience of the tension between the dictates of politics and of morality and of the corresponding need to violate the latter for the sake of the former should be painful still. Or so proponents of the ‘no pain no gain’ hypothesis might argue. Put differently, Hoederer’s and Churchill’s attitude towards the messiness of politics might be calm and passionate, but it need not be painless. The objection is that by moving from innocence to experience, we have merely moved from schizophrenia – a state in which one’s motives and reasons point to opposite directions – to a milder form of psychological struggle – a state in which one’s reasons and motives are in harmony but entails two distinct motivations pointing in different directions. That move might render the experience of DH more coherent and *prima facie* stable, but not painless-free. Indeed, one might well argue that the account presented here collapses into a variant of schizophrenia: getting one’s hands dirty requires

the experienced politician to betray some of her motivations (by compromising her moral aspirations), and irrespective of the experienced politician's preparedness to do so, the experience of DH remains traumatic and precarious still.

Dirty Hands, and the Physiology of Moral Conflict

At the core of the 'no pain no gain' hypothesis seems to lie an assumption that sustains both the objection to the account of the serene dirty-handed politician rehearsed above and the account of the schizophrenic politician elaborated earlier: the conviction that DH entails internal conflict and that internal conflict is traumatic (irrespective of whether it is encountered by innocent or experienced individuals). It is not surprising that some DH scholars, as noted in the introduction, appeal to the experience of suffering – an experience that, they contend, forms 'a crucial feature of our moral life' (Walzer 1973: 171; see also de Wijze 2005; Gowans 2001) – as testament to the fragmentation of morality, the existence of genuine moral conflicts. Yet, as suggested earlier, the contention that internal conflict *always* entails suffering seems unsatisfactorily totalising; it appears to sit uneasily with the way in which *some* of the paradigmatic cases of dirty-handed politicians experience the squalor of politics. What might adherents of the 'no pain, no gain' hypothesis make of the alternative account of Hoederer's and Churchill's inner life? If one accepts that Hoederer and/or Churchill are not irresponsible politicians – that is, simple-minded monists who white-wash their dirt to themselves – it would appear that their seemingly pain-free outlook towards the conflicts that politics engenders, either rests on a mistake or is fuelled by a refusal to acknowledge their 'true' predicament and suffering in public. Put simply, Hoederer and Churchill are either confused – that is, they might be suppressing their suffering – or lying for important political reasons; their denial of their suffering forms part of their endeavour to sustain their quest

to secure paramount political ends amid precarious times by galvanising and offering moral clarity to their audience. Again, the supposition here is that DH entails inner conflict and that inner conflict should be painful, irrespective of whether one is sincere to oneself and/or one's audience.

But why should the inner moral conflict that the DH problem entails be regarded as traumatic? Why must a conflicted individual be either tormented *or* confused? In the association between conflict and suffering, it appears, lurks the belief that inner conflict should be accompanied by suffering because it is a kind of mental dysfunction and dysfunctions, inevitably, cause suffering. The connection between internal conflict and dysfunction is fruitful, as it furnishes the conviction that the conflict that the idea of DH entails should be painful. As Edyvane explains, 'we often associate states of bodily malfunction with pain and normal function with serenity and even pleasure', 'The manic depressive', for instance, 'suffers ... because her brain is malfunctioning' (2011a: 412–413). The experienced dirty-handed politician, should thus suffer because, her allegiance to politics notwithstanding, she is plagued by internal conflict that constitutes a dysfunction – a deviation from a state of inner harmony that is presumed normal and desirable. The supposition is that, like bodily malfunction, which entails pain because it is deleterious to human well-being, inner conflict entails suffering because it is deleterious to human flourishing. It is this assumption, recall, that sustains Stocker's (1976: 473–474) contention that schizophrenia is detrimental to the 'good life'.

The conviction that conflict is a dysfunction – a deviation from the ideal state of inner serenity – runs through the history of philosophy and 'descends unashamed' upon a large portion of contemporary political thought (Hampshire 1993b). In *The Republic*, Plato's Socrates contends that a happy and healthy soul should be harmonious: that, if one were to flourish, one should bind 'all the factors together' and ensure that his soul is in a state of 'perfect unity instead of a plurality'.

For a soul in conflict, Plato (1993: 443d–444b) maintains, is inimical to flourishing: ‘disruption ... constitutes ... badness of any kind’. Yet, Hampshire notes, we have no intellectual reason to accept the enduring Platonist picture of the soul or the conviction that harmony constitutes the mark of a healthy or normal soul, for Plato’s account of the soul derives from his prior conception of his ideal city that reflects his substantive moral/ideological sympathies: it constitutes a ‘fairytale’ that forms the ‘decorative part of a polemic against democracy’ (Hampshire 1993b: 45). As Edyvane (2011b: 82) notes, ‘Plato invents a picture of the soul that is inhospitable to conflict in order to justify a picture of community that is inhospitable to conflict to which he was in fact already committed on independent ... grounds’. The trouble with any picture of the soul, then, is that the soul, to use Arendt’s (1965: 96) words, ‘is a place of darkness which, with certainty, no human eye can penetrate’; ‘[U]nlike arms and legs’, the structure and nature of the soul ‘are a philosophical invention’ (Hampshire 1999: 29–30). For,

Philosophers have been free to construct models of the soul as they please to serve their moral and political advocacy. Philosophers advocating democracy rather than aristocracy can represent the soul as an assembly of conflicting desires, in which it is arranged that the strongest combination of desires will come out on top and will determine action. (Hampshire 1989: 34–35)

The Platonic account of the soul, ‘the picture of the perpetual conflict of desires’ that should be ‘controlled’, has become a ‘dead metaphor’ in ‘common European and American vocabulary’; it seems ‘so natural’ and ‘unavoidable that we do not recognise the historical contingencies’ from which it originates. That aristocratic account, however, has ‘no more, and no less warrant than the democratic one’ to which it is diametrically opposed (Hampshire 1989: 35).

On the democratic account, which Hampshire (1999) traces to Heraclitus, conflict is not a malfunction – a deviation from the normal, desirable or healthy state of affairs – but rather *normal*, *essential* and, to an extent, *desirable* a feature of our lives. This contrasting account is sustained by the ethical analogue of the ‘old logical principle’: ‘all determination is negation’ (*omnis determinatio est negatio*), the idea that ‘individuals inevitably become conscious of the cost exacted by their own way of life and of the other possibilities of achievement and enjoyment discarded. They feel the cost in internal conflict also. Every established way of life has its cost in repression’ (Hampshire 1989b: 146–147). This principle is also captured by Berlin:

ends equally ultimate, ultimate sacred may come into collision without the possibility of rational arbitration ... not merely in exceptional circumstances, as a result of abnormality or accident or error ... but as part of the normal human situation ... One chooses classical civilisation rather than the Theban desert, Rome and not Jerusalem ... because such is one's nature, and ... *because it is that of men ... everywhere* (1980: 74–75, my emphasis)

Conflict, on this account, is not just inevitable; it has ‘life-giving’ quality’ and constitutes a source of vitality (Hampshire 1993a). A life devoid of conflict would be lifeless and inhuman: ‘harmony and inner consensus come only with death’ (Hampshire 1989a: 189). It would also be devoid of moral content and purpose. For one’s capacity to find meaning and worth in one’s life, to pursue what one finds meaningful and worthwhile, is *moulded through* conflict; it is conditioned upon the rejection of what one finds morally meaningless and worthless.

The picture of the politician tormented by the conflicts that politics engenders is thus no more plausible than the picture of the politician who acquiesces to and finds enjoyment in these. ‘It is impossible’, Hampshire (1989a: 34) notes, ‘to point to the decisive tests, or to the impartially

collected evidence, on which a judgement as to the truth of these pictures could be based'. The most compelling piece of evidence that we possess for the conviction that conflict constitutes a dysfunction is that 'we' – as Walzer (1973), de Wijze (1994, 2005), and Gowans (2001) note – find these traumatic. But this would not do. As Hampshire (1989a: 171) emphasises, '[i]t is difficult to exaggerate the width of the gap between the virtues of a political commentator and theorist on one side and the virtues of someone actually exercising power as ruler and leader on the other side'. Even if we allow that politicians, innocent or otherwise, might be traumatised by conflict – that the contention that conflict is painful does not constitute an abstract generalisation of an innocent philosopher's proclivities – the argument would still remain problematic:

The argument is circular: because we find conflict painful, we infer that it is dysfunctional and the idea that it is dysfunctional encourages us to think that we are right to find it painful. And the circle here might well be vicious ... many people [might] find inner conflict painful simply because they (falsely) believe it to be a form of dysfunction, not because it actually *is* a form of dysfunction.

(Edyvane 2011a: 415)

The recognition that any account of inner conflict is bound to rest on a speculative account of the soul and would, inevitably, be a philosophical invention entails that the picture of the experienced dirty-handed politician painted in the previous section – the individual who, like Churchill, approaches the conflicts with which he is faced with a tranquil gaze and finds 'excitement' in 'balancing terrible things' – is not as implausible as it might first appear. Her recognition that political life is ridden with insoluble conflicts and dreary choices might be accompanied with the renunciation of the conviction that the desirable state of the soul – for practitioners of politics, at least – is one of harmony. She perceives inner, irreconcilable conflict and the repression of some

of her substantive moral aspirations as a normal aspect of (political) life and a reaffirmation of what she stands for, of her fidelity in politics. Her calm, passionate attitude stems from the Heraclitian conviction that conflict is not just normal an aspect of politics but rather a source of vitality.

This recognition has crucial implications for the Catholic and Protestant models. Their contention that conflict is inescapable and predictable in politics notwithstanding, proponents of such models – by virtue of their tendency to associate conflict with suffering – seem to have unquestioningly inherited the Platonic conviction that conflict is a disorder – that, at least in theory, harmony constitutes the natural and desirable state of the soul. That proponents of the Protestant model conceive of the tension between politics and morality as transient, ultimately resolvable is thus unsurprising. But the conviction that conflict bespeaks of a departure from an ideal state of harmony also animates the Catholic account, despite its insight that conflict is incessant. This emerges most clearly in Hampshire's review of Williams's *Moral Luck* that contains his essay on DH. Hampshire (1982) approves of Williams's rejection of the Platonist picture: the value-monist picture of final rational harmony and welcomes his suggestion that conflicts are perpetual and irresolvable. Yet, Hampshire (1982: 13) laments, 'Williams' is 'still more under the influence of Plato than of Heraclitus'; he does not go as far as to endorse the Heraclitian claim that 'it is only an insoluble conflict ... which lends moral significance to existence, and that such conflicts ... constitute the essence ... of our humanity'.

Conclusion

Contra the common way of thinking about DH, I suggest that the tendency to associate DH with suffering rests on a problematic conception of inner conflict as a dysfunction and that a

politician who does not anguish over the dreary choices that politics entails need not be politically vicious. Hence, neither the DH problem nor the aspiration of being ruled by responsible politicians need be as unstable or unsustainable as they might seem. In advancing these claims, I sketched an alternative picture of the good dirty-handed politician, at the core of which lies an idiosyncratic account of ‘deep’ value pluralism: the DH problem – the rift between politics and morality – does not entail an insurmountable conflict between the *action-guiding* demands of conscience and of political duty that confronts morally good individuals but rather an irreconcilable tension between two incompatible ways of life, each with its own distinct demands and standards of excellence.

My argument is not conclusive and merely constitutes *one* way in which we might be able to better conceptualise what is at stake when pondering over the DH problem in politics. If valid, however, it does upset the prevalent conviction that DH should entail suffering. Such a claim is not purely empirical in nature; for what follows from my argument is that the connection between DH and suffering cannot be addressed (if it can be addressed) without clarifying the nature of conflict DH cases entail, the place of conflict in politics and human life and the nature of political morality. Indeed, my argument has important implications for our culture of ‘instant remorse’ – the demand that ‘our political leaders ... have the right sort of feelings and to display them’ (Judt 2004). These attitudes that stem from and feed our political cynicism seem to be sustained by presuppositions similar to those animating the prevalent conceptualisation of DH and reveal a problematic ‘transition from private relations to public affairs’ (Judt 2004), a tendency to conflate the standards of a morally admirable way of life with those conducive to political excellence. Whilst feelings have a place in politics, my argument entails that we should approach these, the character and actions of our politicians by appealing to considerations appropriate to their way of

life. Doing so might enable us to see politics and our politicians, despite – or, perhaps, because of – their dirt in a different light.

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Notes

¹. 'There is nothing', Alex Bellamy notes, 'to indicate that Churchill had moral concerns [about terror-bombing] at the beginning of the campaign' (2008: 52) and distanced himself from the policy by concealing his dirt via dissimulation only when it became strategically unnecessary on the one hand and apparent that the populace opposed the policy on the other (see Bellamy 2009; Connelly 2002).