

After the Standard Dirty Hands Thesis: Towards a Dynamic Account of Dirty Hands in Politics

Demetris Tillyris¹

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Abstract This essay locates the problem of dirty hands (DH) within virtue ethics – specifically Alasdair MacIntyre’s neo-Aristotelian thesis in *After Virtue*. It demonstrates that, *contra* contemporary expositions of this problem, MacIntyre’s thesis provides us with a more nuanced account of tragedy and DH in ordinary life, in its conventional understanding as a stark, rare and momentary conflict in which moral wrongdoing is inescapable. The essay then utilizes elements from MacIntyre’s thesis as a theoretical premise for Machiavelli’s thought so as to set the foundations for a nascent but richer framework of DH in politics and move beyond the standard, ‘static’ conceptualization of the problem within this context. In developing a dynamic account of DH, I conceive of politics as a distinct practice and way of life, with its own demands and standards of excellence, and draw on Machiavelli’s thought to sketch some of these. The dynamic account uncovers an inexhaustible tension between two ways of life, each with its own demands and standards of excellence: a virtuous politician should become partially vicious and no longer innocent. Understood in dynamic terms, DH in politics involves a *paradox of character*, not just a *paradox of action* as the standard, ‘static’ DH thesis suggests.

Keywords Dirty hands · Machiavelli · MacIntyre · Political ethics · Moral conflict

The problem of dirty hands (DH), Michael Walzer (1973) suggests, captures Machiavelli’s recognition: morality and politics conflict. The problem is such that politicians are confronted with a tragic dilemma, a paradox of action – situations in which they must act immorally for political reasons (i.e., they may issue torture to extract life-saving information). The demands of morality – which are, as argued, deontological – conflict with those of politics – which are, as suggested, consequentialist. Whilst the politician should satisfy the requirements of politics, her choice carries a remainder. This insight challenges the Kantian and Utilitarian value-monist

✉ Demetris Tillyris
ipidt@leeds.ac.uk

¹ Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, UK

vision of innocence and harmony as unsatisfactorily idealistic and insensitive to our fragmented morality and messiness of politics.

Several DH theorists criticize Walzer's account for its 'narrowness': DH, they suggest, might be confronted by non-professional politicians; it might involve a dilemma in ordinary life¹ (Stocker 1990; Gowans 2001). However, as I have recently argued, the debate over the scope of DH is beside the point (Tillyris 2015).² For, what is at stake in this debate is *neither* the general Walzerian conception of DH as a stark paradox of action *nor* its affinities with Machiavelli's thought. These are taken for granted and *then* applied beyond politics. These 'broader' accounts of DH are Walzerian still. And this standard Walzerian conception of DH *in politics* does *not* suffice; despite its professed Machiavellian lineage, it misconstrues Machiavelli's point: it fails to capture the fragmentation of morality and messiness of politics and collapses into the idealism it purportedly rejects³ (Tillyris 2015). The standard DH thesis is 'static': it conceives of the conflict between morality and politics as a momentary, surmountable anomaly disrupting the normality of harmony. Its departing assumption is an *ex-ante* innocent man who, once confronted with the prospect of wrongdoing, temporarily relinquishes his innocence (Walzer 1973: 161; 178; Tillyris 2015). The DH thesis, I have argued, misconstrues the *extent* of the conflict between morality and politics. Machiavelli's recognition that the conflict between morality and politics is perpetual and insurmountable is supplanted by an unsatisfactory vision of harmony, innocence and salvation. The DH thesis underestimates the enduring necessity of dirty acts (the practice of the vices). Its conviction that innocence and harmony can be restored by revealing one's dirt to the community (which should inflict purgative punishment) overlooks Machiavelli's suggestion that unreflective truthfulness compromises on-going political commitment; it mischaracterizes certain distinct political virtues (i.e., hypocrisy). But DH theorists also misconceive the precise *nature* of the conflict. For, Machiavelli's lesson is that 'politicians must learn how not to be good', *not* that they must merely 'learn how not to act well'. There exists, in short, a discrepancy between one's ability to take Machiavelli's advice seriously, so that innocence-as-a-disposition is relinquished, and acting immorally following one's confrontation with a paradox of action, so that innocence-as-the-absence-of-wrongdoing is lost. DH theorists' overemphasis on action neglects how moral character – innocence-as-a-disposition, the absence of political virtue (*virtù*) and experience – jeopardizes politics; as such, the *ex-ante* innocent politician DH theorists envision is not as good for politics as they assume.

¹ See also de Wijze and Goodwin (2009) who cast DH as a conflict between incompatible 'oughts'.

² This need not deny the possibility or philosophical coherence of tragic dilemmas in ordinary life (Tillyris 2015: 62). MacIntyre's account, I illustrate, offers a richer understanding of tragedy and DH – in its traditional conception as a stark conflict involving inescapable wrongdoing. Accepting the possibility of tragedy in ordinary life, however, does *not* entail that conceptualizing DH in politics as a momentary paradox of action suffices. It is this 'static' conception, I suggested, that most DH theorists borrow from Walzer (despite their disagreements over the scope and precise characterization of DH) and which is unsatisfactorily idealistic in certain on-going activities, most notably politics. These are controversial points but I state them boldly as I depart from them and seek to develop an alternative, dynamic account of DH in politics. Further, my critique and the dynamic account, by virtue of their Machiavellian affiliations, entail that ordinary and political morality cannot be harmonized in a perfect, coherent whole. This is a controversial point and is disputed by moralists (Kant 1903; Donagan 1977). Providing an all-encompassing defence of this point is beyond this essay's scope but if we can accept its validity, my argument helps us to better grasp this conflict.

³ This does not apply to *all* DH analyses; there exists a rift within the DH tradition: between those espousing the standard, idealistic DH thesis (Walzer, de Wijze, Gowans and Stocker) and those sensitive to Machiavelli's political realism (Hampshire, Williams, Hollis and Bellamy). See Tillyris (2015).

Machiavelli's conception of DH is thus underpinned by a particular approach to political ethics that remains elusive for DH theorists: a theory of virtues. However, Mark Philp laments, "Machiavelli makes no attempt to offer a theory of virtues per se" (2007: 44). This recognition leaves us with a residual problem: if my suggestion that we should reconceptualise DH in politics is correct, how should we proceed? This essay suggests that MacIntyre's neo-Aristotelian thesis in *After Virtue* (which preceded his Thomist-Aristotelian turn) can serve as a theoretical premise upon which we can set the foundations of a nascent but richer account of DH in politics which restores Machiavelli's lost insights.⁴ It enables us to develop a dynamic framework that grasps DH in politics in all its complexity by conceiving politics as an on-going activity, largely (but not entirely) on its own terms. This involves considering more carefully the qualities of character conducive to virtuous political practice (Tillyris 2015: 63–65). Indeed, MacIntyre's (1990: 369) later repudiation of the suggestion that "the virtues of one ideal character bring about the vices of the other" which entails "an inescapably defective character", is the claim I advance and which, I suggest, follows from his *After Virtue*.

First, I outline MacIntyre's 'negative thesis' – his critique of modern philosophy. MacIntyre's critique, I argue, adds new insights to the inadequacy of the DH thesis and provides a historical explanation to my claim that DH theorists displace Machiavelli's thought. I then outline MacIntyre's 'positive' thesis. MacIntyre, I illustrate, rejects Aristotle's dismissal of tragedy and offers a richer account of DH in ordinary life (in its traditional conception as a stark conflict in which wrongdoing is inescapable). Finally, I draw on MacIntyre's thesis to depart from the 'static' conception of DH as a momentary, surmountable tragic episode in politics. In developing a dynamic account of DH, I conceive of politics as a distinct practice and way of life, with its own demands and standards of excellence, and draw on Machiavelli's insights on political agency and *virtù* to sketch some of these. Understood in dynamic terms, DH in politics involves a *paradox of character*, not just a *paradox of action* (or a series of these): virtuous politicians should become partially vicious and no longer innocent.

1 MacIntyre's 'Negative Thesis' and the Malaise of the Dirty Hands Thesis

MacIntyre's *After Virtue* MacIntyre (2007) suggests that contemporary philosophy is in disarray. Whilst philosophical analyses are marked by interminable disagreements, they strikingly imply that a rational, perfect resolution to these should exist; moral discourse claims to be characterized by objectivity, rationality and universal applicability. But our moral concepts are useless, MacIntyre argues. Our philosophical disorder is so immense that we lack the resources to recognize and repair it. Philosophy is composed by simulacra of morality: a mass of incoherent conceptual fragments that survived from the past, detached from the wider viewpoint which rendered them meaningful.

The culprit for our malaise, MacIntyre suggests, is the 'Enlightenment project' (Kant, Bentham and their deontologist and consequentialist heirs). The Enlightenment's erroneous aspiration to discover an independent, universal and systematic "rational justification of morality" overestimated the authority of reason and led to nihilism (AV, 39). Whilst the Enlightenment *philosophes* agreed on the character of morality, and what a rational justification of morality might be, they disagreed on "the character of moral rationality" and "the substance

⁴ My critique and the dynamic account are not confined *only* in politics; they extend to other on-going practices (i.e., torture) (c.f. Tillyris 2015: 65–66). Doing so, however, is beyond this essay's scope.

of the morality... to be founded on that rationality” (AV, 21). Since those seeking to derive principles which rational agents should embrace could not agree on these with those sharing their purpose, the project failed. Its failure, MacIntyre suggests, was inevitable – because of what the *philosophes* took morality to be and what they rejected. The Enlightenment’s overestimation of reason’s authority was the product of its repudiation of Aristotelian ethics.

MacIntyre’s chronology of disaster, it appears, is unsatisfactory. The quest for a universal morality which rational agents ought to embrace and the belief that moral conflicts are implausible are traceable to Plato and endorsed by Aristotle, MacIntyre’s hero (Berlin 1990; Hampshire 1989, 1993). Indeed, it is this moralistic vision which Machiavelli’s (1998) realist political ethic sought to supplant. Hence, MacIntyre’s account, by virtue of its apparent Aristotelian moralism, *prima facie* sits uneasily with Machiavelli’s thought. My endeavour to provide a MacIntyrean explanation surrounding the malaise of the DH thesis and, subsequently, to utilize elements from MacIntyre’s account to restore Machiavelli’s insights seems problematic.

But the recognition that Aristotle endorses, what Berlin (1990) terms, the Platonic Ideal need not render MacIntyre’s charge obsolete. For, MacIntyre’s account accommodates the above concerns. As I explain later on, whilst MacIntyre’s account in *After Virtue* constitutes an expression of Aristotelianism this label is slightly misleading: MacIntyre rejects the Platonic Ideal and treats Aristotle as “the representative of a long tradition”, *not* as an individual theorist (AV, 146). And, I argue, it is by acknowledging that Machiavelli’s thought, despite its aversion to Aristotle’s moralism, constituted part of this pre-Enlightenment tradition, that we can create the conceptual space to explain why DH theorists displace Machiavelli’s thought and develop a dynamic account of DH in politics. The Enlightenment is thus not exonerated from MacIntyre’s indictment: post-Enlightenment philosophy lost something of value by repudiating Aristotelian ethics.

For Aristotle the good life is lived in accordance with virtue, understood against the background of a teleological conception; there exists a contrast between ‘man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature’ with ‘man-as-he-happens-to-be’. The good was functionally defined: Aristotle’s teleology enabled us to discern the virtues and actions necessary for the good life and entailed the possibility of ethical failure, if one employed actions which negated his *telos*. The rejection of Aristotelian teleology nonetheless, obliterated the distinction between ‘man-as-he-happens-to-be’ and ‘man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature’ and the recognition that we have any purpose beyond what we choose. This left us with “a moral scheme” composed by “elements whose relationship” was “quite unclear” (AV, 55). Our understanding of the virtues became deformed: morality degenerated into an incoherent set of abstract principles, deprived of the teleological background which rendered them meaningful. The post-Enlightenment self is governed merely by the dictates of his own internal reason and is a criterionless, ‘static’ chooser, starting at every moment from *tabula rasa* and operating in a vacuum, lacking any social identity and *telos*.

So, MacIntyre’s ‘negative thesis’ highlights the need for teleology – to restore the meaningful distinction between what we are and what we ought to be – and the social embeddedness of our *telos*. The implications of MacIntyre’s charge are profound: post-Enlightenment philosophy lacks the resources to reflect on a central question of ethical inquiry – “the question: what sort of person am I to become?” (AV, 118). From the post-Enlightenment standpoint, this question is overshadowed by an otiose obsessiveness with abstract principles.

But MacIntyre's critique does not merely challenge contemporary deontological, consequentialist theories – their attempts to perfectly resolve moral conflicts by appeal to certain overarching principles. Besides, these are also deemed unsatisfactory by the DH thesis. Rather, MacIntyre's indictment is levelled against contemporary philosophy *in toto* of which the DH thesis constitutes an integral part. Walzer's (1973; 2004) conception of DH as a conflict between deontological and consequentialist imperatives is suggestive.⁵ Whilst DH theorists correctly identify problems with Kantian and Utilitarian theories, they do not necessarily reject the overall validity and premises of such theories. Put differently, whilst standard discussions of DH challenge the Kantian and Utilitarian vision of harmony – its denial of moral conflict and of inescapable wrongdoing – they typically take the abstract, socially detached principles and 'oughts' propounded by Kantianism and Utilitarianism for granted.

Hence, DH analyses are also composed by simulacra of morality and are thereby bound to lack the resources to reflect on the question of 'what sort of person I should become'. De Wijze's and Goodwin's (2009) 'broader' conception of DH as a conflict between two 'oughts' whereby one should bring about the 'lesser evil' is suggestive of this. Consider their discussion of Williams's (1973) Jim and the Indians – a situation whereby Jim must choose between killing one innocent person to save the rest or condemn all ten to death. This example reveals the possibility of tragedy (*ergo* DH as conventionally understood) outside politics but, *pace* de Wijze and Goodwin, it is not just that consequentialism denies the existence of a remainder. To steadfastly contend that Jim should pick the 'lesser evil' (in consequentialist terms) is to miss a crucial, MacIntyrean aspect of Williams (1973: 116–117) critique of consequentialism: Jim's actions should be seen as the actions "which flow from the projects" *he* is "most closely identified" with. Like Utilitarianism, de Wijze and Goodwin ignore that Jim has a *particular* history, identity and a sense of *telos* that shape *his* experiences and inform *his* choices.

This point becomes more profound in contemporary, standard discussions of DH in politics. As I have argued, the DH politician's decision to publicly reveal her dirt and subject herself to cathartic punishment is not as straightforward as standard DH theorists hold. For, the DH politician is faced with a second-order DH dilemma: a) either to honestly reveal her dirt to the demos so as to restore her forgone innocence, at the cost of political exile and failure; or b) marshal on, satisfy her political commitment, at the cost of deceiving us and betraying our demand for morally good and innocent politicians again. The rift between ordinary and political morality does not evaporate as the DH thesis suggests. Differently put, the DH thesis neglects the difference "between commitment to on-going political activity and a one-off example of political expression". It also fails to capture the recognition that, for a politician, that decision is "part of [her] life" (Williams 1978: 58; Tillyris 2015: 68).

The upshot of this is that the DH thesis, by virtue of its static nature, cannot grasp what it means to lead a virtuous political life. That this thesis misrepresents Machiavelli's thought – that, it misconstrues his recognition that the conflict between morality and politics is perpetual, insurmountable and deeper than a mere incompatibility of action-guiding prescriptions – is unsurprising. Nor is it surprising that the

⁵ This point, I explain, extends to de Wijze's and Goodwin's account which subsumes and does *not* reject such theories.

innocent politician DH theorists envision is not good for politics. At the core of the problems I have identified- the DH thesis' abstract contention that the DH politician should suffer from guilt or tragic remorse and publically reveal her dirt to regain her innocence; its failure to capture certain political virtues and the way moral character jeopardizes politics (Tillyris 2015: 64–72) - lies the post-Enlightenment self: a 'static' chooser, starting at every moment *de novo*, without a reference to a *telos* and *in abstracto* of the social context in which she is placed. Hence, MacIntyre's 'negative thesis' provides a historical explanation to my claim that DH theorists displace Machiavelli's insights on DH and political morality: DH theorists lack the resources to reflect on the question of 'what sort of person a virtuous politician should become' because they inherited a non-teleological moral worldview from the Enlightenment – the product of the Enlightenment's rejection of Aristotelian ethics of which Machiavelli's thought constituted part.

2 MacIntyre's 'Positive Thesis': Tragedy, Conflict and Dirty Hands

MacIntyre's 'negative thesis' echoes my earlier suggestion: to capture DH in all its complexity, a theory of virtues is necessary. We should thus start afresh and "put Aristotelianism to the question" again (AV, 119). The restoration of a teleological approach implies that morality must be understood in terms of the virtues rather than abstract rules. These refer to "dispositions which ... sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices" and "which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the ... dangers, temptations and ... furnish us with increasing self-knowledge (AV, 207). MacIntyre replaces the criterionless modern self which lacks any *telos* with a narrative conception of the self; he supplants the post-Enlightenment obsession with abstract rules and 'undersocialized' self with practice-based virtues and the notion of tradition.

In what follows, I shall outline some of these elements of MacIntyre's account. In so doing, I illustrate that MacIntyre's account contains commitments antithetical to Aristotle's moralism – his conviction that the good life should be single and unitary; that the goods and virtues should co-exist in a perfect, harmonious whole. MacIntyre's account, I show, contains elements stemming from the pre-Aristotelian tradition and echoes Machiavelli's and his heirs' (i.e., Berlin and Hampshire) emphasis on pluralism and conflict.⁶ It is these elements – the notions of practice and life as a dramatic narrative – I emphasize. For, it is these elements, I suggest, which create the conceptual space to: i) capture the possibility of tragedy and DH in ordinary life (in its traditional conception as a stark choice in which wrongdoing is inescapable) and mend some of the problems identified above; and ii) develop a dynamic account of DH in politics.

The virtues, MacIntyre suggests, must be understood in terms of 'practices'. This concept is retrieved from Homer's account of the virtues: the virtuous agent is defined by 'the mask he wears' and excels at a particular activity, in his social role (Finley 2002). The Homeric conception of practice-based virtues provides MacIntyre an arena in which the virtues are

⁶ A similar point is made by Bavister-Gould (2008) and Galston (1998).

identified. A practice, entails standards of excellence and internal goods. In contrast to external goods, internal goods can only be achieved by engaging in a particular practice. For instance, the goods that consist in playing chess well (strategic capacity), are goods internal to this practice; material rewards (money) are external goods. The latter are contingently attached to practices and are “objects of competition” from which winners and losers emerge (AV, 188 – 190); when achieved, such goods become the property of a specific individual. In contrast, internal goods can only be specified and identified in terms of a particular practice and by participating in it. Internal goods are also the outcome of competition to excel but their achievement is a good for the community; as opposed to merely being possessed by and benefiting only a particular individual.

Therefore, the criteria for virtuous conduct are determined by the practice one engages in. This concept highlights the importance of the wider social context: to enter and virtuously engage in a practice, one must heed and “accept the authority of those standards and the inadequacy of” one’s “own performance as judged by them” (AV, 190). One should, in short, identify and absorb its standards and ends - to grasp and cultivate the intrinsic goods secured by it. The concept of a practice provides us with objective standards of excellence, reasons for cultivating the virtues and a kind of ‘substitute’ *telos*.

The term ‘substitute’ should be highlighted here; for, the ends produced by practices do not amount to a satisfactory *telos*. For anyone not living as a Homeric character, a life informed by a conception of virtue *solely* derived from practices would be too arbitrary: “the modern self with its criterionless choices” would reappear in “what was claimed to be an Aristotelian world” (AV, 202). A crucial problem is how to rationally adjudicate between the competing ends of the various practices composing one’s life. This requires an account of a *telos* for one’s whole life in light of which these can be adjudicated. Thus, casting a conception of virtue solely in terms of practices is insufficient: without a teleological approach our conception of certain virtues remains “partial and incomplete” (AV, 202). In Aristotle’s account though, ethics is conceived as a “science” and “pre-supposes his metaphysical biology”: human beings have a specific nature, aims and goals and move towards a specific *telos* (AV, 162). This is the part of Aristotle’s theory which MacIntyre rejects and supplants with an alternative teleology which allows for tragic conflict.

This alternative account, I suggested, is retrieved from a pre-Aristotelian standpoint – *contra* Aristotle’s account, where the conception of virtue is detached from that of a particular social role and becomes a question of what is good *qua* man, MacIntyre supplies the Homeric concept of practice-based virtues. But MacIntyre also draws insights from Sophoclean tragedy. This underpins MacIntyre’s most crucial dissatisfaction with Aristotle’s thought: it is replete with a “denial of conflict either within the life of individual good man or in that of the good city” (AV, 157). MacIntyre detects the more ancient belief, descending to Aristotle from Plato’s *Republic*: the Platonic Ideal. Like Plato, Aristotle held that, since conflict in the *polis* is ‘the worst of evils’, the good life should be unitary, composed of a hierarchy of goods: “there exists a cosmic order which dictates the place of each virtue in a total harmonious scheme of human life”. Consequently, “conflict and virtue are mutually incompatible and exclusive” – a situation whereby “rival goods” are “at war with each other” is inconceivable and the product of our irrationality (AV, 141 – 142). But does this “cover Antigone and Creon” MacIntyre ponders (AV, 179). What Aristotle erroneously denies then, is the “insight that tragic conflict is the essential human condition – the tragic hero on Aristotle’s view fails because of his own flaw, not because the human condition is sometimes irremediably tragic” (AV, 157). Aristotle, MacIntyre concludes, “offers too simple and unified a view of the complexities of the human

good”; his emphasis on “coherence and unity” is an “idealization” (AV, 157). Echoing Berlin’s (1990) and Hampshire’s (1989) Machiavellian contention that history suggests that conflict is ineliminable, MacIntyre notes: “if we look at the realities of ... the ancient world, what we find is a recognition of a diversity of values, of conflicts between goods, of the virtues not forming a simple, coherent and hierarchical unity” (AV, 157). Hence, by turning to Sophocles, one of Plato’s ‘enemies’, MacIntyre endeavours to correct Aristotle’s dismissal of our messy morality.

This unearths a point I indicated earlier: MacIntyre concedes that Aristotle, like the *philosophes*, claims universal rational authority which is unsustainable. Unlike the *philosophes*, however, Aristotle’s account was teleological – a conception which MacIntyre maintains. Hence the second ingredient of MacIntyre’s scheme: the narrative unity of human life. This ingredient integrates Aristotle’s contention that we should approach one’s life as a whole and in functional terms with the “thesis about the relationship between virtues and forms of narratives” present in tragic writers (AV, 147). This gives rise to a conception of life as a dramatic narrative within which the central characters are also authors. MacIntyre’s account puts forward a non-Aristotelian teleology which avoids the problem of arbitrary adjudication between different practices whilst allowing for tragic conflict.

Herein emerges MacIntyre’s alternative conception of the self, “whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death” (AV, 205). MacIntyre’s narrative conception of the self is underpinned by two claims: i) man is a story-telling animal; and ii) to understand one’s actions and virtues, we must place these in a narrative sequence; the virtues stemming from our engagement in practices should be seen as “contributing to the good of a whole life” (AV, 273). MacIntyre’s first claim reflects our ordinary experience: to identify what someone is doing we place “a particular episode in the context of ... narrative histories ... both of the individuals concerned and of the settings they act and suffer” (AV, 211). However, MacIntyre adds, without a narrative approach to ethics we cannot fully understand any individual life, including our own (AV, 216). We will miss much, as contemporary philosophy does, of the virtues and significance of our attachments. Hence, “I can only answer the question ‘what am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’” (AV, 216). To understand what I ought to do and choose between conflicting practices, goods and values I must acknowledge my life’s narrative structure: “the notion of a history is as fundamental a notion as the notion of an action. Each requires the other.” (AV, 214). Without an understanding of the roles we occupy, we cannot have an adequate sense of ‘the self’ and discern which action to employ. The way I define myself now, flows from my past; the search of what I am, ought to do and become is a journey that connects my past, present and future.

So, MacIntyre’s account is partly expounded in terms of practice and the narrative unity of a life. *Contra* Aristotle, it gleans insights from Homer’s *epen* and Sophoclean tragedy and is formulated in terms of the multiplicity and heterogeneity of goods; it acknowledges that “what is to live the good life ... varies from circumstance to circumstance” and allows for tragic conflict (AV, 220). This creates the conceptual space to capture the DH problem, as it grasps the DH thesis’s core insight – that a conflict between two ‘oughts’ carries a remainder. In tragic conflicts, MacIntyre says, “by choosing one [course of action], I do nothing to ... derogate from the claims upon me of the other”; rather, “whatever I do, I shall have left undone what I ought to have done” (AV, 224). Our *cosmos* is such, MacIntyre argues, that tragedy is an ever-present possibility. This is also implied in MacIntyre’s narrative conception: “at any given point in an

enacted dramatic narrative, we do not know what will happen next” (AV, 215). The permanence of circumstantial moral luck deems innocence-as-the-absence-of-wrongdoing fragile.

There exist, however, crucial differences between the way MacIntyre captures tragic conflicts *vis-à-vis* the DH thesis – differences which suggest that MacIntyre’s perspective of tragedy is richer than the latter, which utilizes deontological and utilitarian theories and thus departs from abstract premises (Johnson 1994). Instead of presupposing a set of abstract rules upon which all rational agents ought to ascend and paint an impoverished, undersocialized conception of the self, MacIntyre acknowledges that we are particular agents engaged in particular practices, with a particular history, identity, attachments and a sense of *telos*. For, it is only from our social relationships and practices that we can discover our principles and achieve the goods internal to these. Hence, MacIntyre’s account equips us with a concrete arena upon which we can ground the plurality of goods and values. It provides a framework upon which we can premise the standard DH conception as a momentary, tragic conflict between two ‘impossible oughts’ and resist framing DH in a vacuum – by interpreting it as a clash between deontological and utilitarian rules. More importantly, MacIntyre’s teleology acknowledges that there are *different* ways to live tragic conflicts (or DH scenarios as conventionally understood). What is better or worse “depends upon the character of that intelligible narrative” which renders one’s life meaningful (AV, 225). Without the recognition that our life has a narrative structure, we would lack the understanding necessary to live through tragic conflicts.

In MacIntyrean terms then, DH involves “a choice between rival and incompatible goods” and values, which stem from one’s engagement in different practices – situations whereby “*both* of the alternative courses of action” lead to “some authentic and substantial good” (AV, 224). What constitutes “tragic opposition”, *ergo* DH (as conventionally understood), are “conflicts in which different virtues” make “rival and incompatible claims upon us” so that “we cannot bring rival moral truths into complete harmony”. In such tragic situations, “one virtue is temporarily ... at war with another” so that the “possession of one virtue might exclude the possession of some other” (AV, 142 – 143; 163). In Sophocles’ *Antigone* for example, there is an irreconcilable rivalry between demands and goods of the family and of the *polis*; “to choose [between such claims] does not exempt” Antigone “from the authority of the claim” she “chose to go against”. Doing what is virtuous *qua* sister becomes *momentarily* incompatible with doing what is virtuous *qua* citizen. Antigone thus gets DH (in the traditional sense): she “cannot do everything that ... she ought to do” (AV, 224; 132–145); she is bound to act virtuously *qua* sister, but viciously *qua* citizen or *vice versa*.

Thus, MacIntyre’s ‘positive thesis’ allows for tragic conflict and for a richer interpretation of DH (as traditionally understood) *vis-à-vis* the DH thesis. But, I said nothing of politics and of the virtues necessary for engaging in this practice. At this point, Machiavelli’s ghost reappears and re-imposes the question of ‘What sort of person should the good politician become?’ To frame DH in politics as a temporary tragic choice – the strict outcome of moral luck – is unsatisfactory (Tillyris 2015). The nature of politics is such that DH dilemmas are predictable and enduring. For the individual who has decided to lead a political life, conflicts and immoral, dirty acts are neither forced nor unexpected. Any reinterpretation of DH as a single, stark episode can get us only this far. To be sure, both ‘static’ and ‘dynamic’ DH, share this much: the agent must decide, to use Martin Hollis’ words, “not merely what to do but who to be” and become (1996: 104). But, the virtuous politician should repudiate her innocence-as-a-disposition at the time she decides to become a politician. And this, *pace* Walzer, may occur long before she becomes guilty of wrongdoing – before she becomes dirty-handed in the

traditional sense (Tillyris 2015). It is to the conception of DH in politics in dynamic terms I turn. MacIntyre's account, I contend, not only captures momentary tragic conflicts in ordinary life, but some of its core elements compel us to move beyond the static conceptualization of DH in politics.

3 The Dynamic Account of DH in Politics: The Virtue of Vice

What sort of person should the virtuous politician become? Addressing Machiavelli's question, and thereby capturing DH in 'dynamic terms', requires us to approach political morality as *a whole*. This involves approaching *politics as a practice* – an activity with its own distinctive demands and goods. As indicated, this approach yields two benefits: i) a concrete approach for grounding ethics *contra* the contemporary philosophical obsession with abstract rules; ii) the provision of dynamic ethical standards which enable us to identify certain distinct dispositions conducive to political excellence. However, since our conception of certain virtues would be incomplete without reference to a *telos*, MacIntyre's narrative conception is also necessary. Thus, capturing DH in dynamic terms also requires approaching *politics as a way of life*. Which goods and virtues are integral to politics nonetheless, MacIntyre does not say. This is where we should turn to Machiavelli.

Whilst MacIntyre does not mention the political virtues, his concept of a practice provides us with the ground to premise Machiavelli's insights. That Machiavelli approaches politics in this way is highlighted by Quentin Skinner: Machiavelli, he writes, focuses on "the right qualities of princely leadership" (2000: 24). As gestured, Machiavelli (like MacIntyre) rejects Aristotle's moralism. Discussing political virtue, Machiavelli argues, by imagining "principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth" is fruitless. For, conventional virtue ethicists (i.e., Plato and Aristotle), ignore that "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" (1998: 61). Political virtue *cannot* aim at anything outside itself: whereas "for Aristotle virtue is shown in politics", for Machiavelli, political virtue "is defined there" (Mansfield 1996: 22). The standards of political excellence arise from *within* politics, *not* from an external moral standpoint.

Machiavelli's warning that failure to cultivate *virtù* brings one's "ruin" additionally suggests what the purpose of *virtù* should be – what (some of) the ends and goods of politics are. Whilst considering the ends of politics, Machiavelli (1996) urges us to consider how Rome was destroyed, its citizens slain, its ceremonies annihilated. Staring from this position, one recognizes that to achieve anything of additional value, there needs to be a degree of order and security (Berlin 1980). Machiavelli's teachings, Whelan (2004: 141) observes, are "put negatively". Hence, *virtù* encompasses qualities of character conducive to the establishment and maintenance of a political community – dispositions which help one to address what Williams terms the first question of politics: "the securing of order, protection, safety, trust, and the conditions of cooperation" (2002: 3). Machiavelli's infamy aside, the Florentine did not think that political practitioners should address this question by bringing about a reign of terror: the point of politics was to save people from this. Nor, need the recognition that Machiavelli's insights are put negatively deny that politics is related to 'positive ends'. The pursuit of positive ends, however, is conditional on Machiavelli's recognition that "the people have a negative desire not to be dominated" (McCormick 2001: 300). It is also conditional on his warning that inflexibility, the innocent pursuit of utopian fantasies, is disastrous. So, whilst politics involves a quest for positive values, these values cannot compromise stability (Philp

2007). The first question of politics bears this adjective because it “is a condition for solving, indeed posing, any others” (Williams 2002: 3).

Politics for Machiavelli (1998) is a complex activity: its practitioners operate within a grubby context. And, since society is characterized by “conflicts between and within groups” (Berlin 1980: 41), politics inescapably involves a struggle to secure and exercise power. This external good should be underlined. For, power – the ownership of resources, the dexterity to get people do things which they otherwise would not do – renders MacIntyre’s characterization of external goods somewhat problematic. Power is not just contingently attached to political practice: it forms a precondition for the satisfaction of political ends and benefits the community *and* the individual practitioner of politics. Failure to accumulate political power, lacking in knowledge on how to do so, would bring about the demise of both the political leader and the community.⁷

So, the prince demonstrates *virtù* by appreciating the challenges of politics. What are the virtues Machiavelli identifies as necessary for virtuous political practice then? Machiavelli’s advice that one must ‘learn how not to be good’ is suggestive. To repeat, *pace* DH theorists, Machiavelli does not indicate that a politician should merely learn to *act* immorally; while he does acknowledge that refusing to act immorally (and get DH as conventionally understood) would be disastrous, the way he unveils the DH problem in politics goes beyond the recognition that it merely involves a paradox of action. Since politics is an on-going practice, Machiavelli’s advice is that once one chooses to pursue this path, one must learn how not to be perfectly virtuous. Political virtue partially rests on “those [moral] vices without which it is difficult to save one’s state” (Machiavelli 1998: 62). Machiavelli’s recognition that *virtù* is intertwined with the cultivation and occasional practice of the vices may strike us as odd, if not obfuscatory. This much is suggested by de Wijze’s endorsement of Senator Goldwater’s remark that “extremism in the defence of liberty is no vice” (2005: 456) – and his postulation that this remark is expressive of the DH thesis. Yet, this idea lies at the core of Machiavelli’s *virtù*: good politicians should not be innocent and *tout court* virtuous as conventionally understood.

Hence, in addition to the paradox of action, acknowledged by DH theorists – the contention that DH involves an action that is justified yet abominable – Machiavelli recognizes that DH involves an additional, more dynamic paradox: the paradox of character – this, I explain, stems from Machiavelli’s recognition that the conflict between morality and politics involves a clash between two different ways of life. This paradox is raised in Chapter XV of *The Prince*, where Machiavelli declares that he would “depart from the orders of others” (1998: 61). As indicated, Machiavelli rejects Aristotle’s moralism and conceives of the virtues as practice-based. In delineating *virtù*, Machiavelli highlights that moral virtue needs “its contrary” – “the added brightness that comes from contrast with and through the cultivation and occasional practice of vice” (Mansfield 1996: 18). This unproblematic coexistence of virtue and vice forms the essence of Machiavelli’s *virtù*: virtuous politicians should know “how to use the beast and the man”⁸ (Machiavelli 1998: 69). What are the beastly characteristics virtuous politicians must learn to cultivate and practice? Machiavelli has a short answer: the over-abundance of conflict, force and guile in politics entails that virtuous politicians should cultivate and *occasionally*

⁷ See Machiavelli’s (1996) discussion of Soderini.

⁸ It is thus not the case that politicians should be vicious altogether, that there are no limits to acting immorally. Determining such limits is beyond this essay’s scope but these should be seen as stemming from the moral messiness of politics. See Philp (2007), Williams (1978; 2002).

practice the vices of *both* “the fox and the lion” (1998: 69). The qualities of the lion are particularly necessary during a *polis*’ founding moments, but they are not enough. If one cultivates only the vice of cruelty one would be inflexible and would observe unwarranted faith in others. To possess *virtù*, one needs the cunningness, dissimulation of the fox; virtuous politicians must know how to ‘colour’ their appearance – to be skilful pretenders and dissimulators (Machiavelli 1996; Hampshire 1989).

Note that Machiavelli does not reject the Aristotelian or Christian conception of the good man altogether: “he does not say that saints are not saints, or that honourable behaviour is not honourable” (Berlin 1980: 49). What Machiavelli condemns is the conviction that ordinary, unreflective moral goodness and innocence are compatible with virtuous politics – that these qualities are political virtues (Berlin 1980; Hampshire 1989). To choose a life of innocence or religious obedience, whilst aspiring to practice politics, is to condemn oneself to impotence. For the individual who considers entering politics then, the dynamic dilemma of DH does not merely involve a momentary conflict between two impossible ways of acting. *Pace* DH theorists, Machiavelli “does not say that while in normal situations ordinary morality should prevail yet abnormal conditions can occur, in which ... this code ... becomes jeopardized, and that in emergencies of this kind, acts which are regarded as wicked and rightly forbidden, are justified” (Berlin 1980: 65). Rather, for Machiavelli, there exist are two irreconcilable worlds – those of politics and morality – each with its own goods and values (Berlin 1980: 58–70). Viewed in dynamic terms then, DH involves a choice between two conflicting, incompatible practices and ways of life, each with its own demands and standards of excellence. From a dynamic perspective, the tragedy of DH lies in the recognition that “having chosen” one must “never look back”. *Pace* Walzer, “one can save one’s soul”, or “serve a state; but not always both” (Berlin 1980: 50; 59). Machiavelli’s politician does pay a price: *at the time* he chooses to lead a political life, he should commit himself towards the cultivation of *virtù* and relinquish the moral virtue of innocence and any hope of salvation; his *telos* involves only worldly achievements. The loss in this dynamic account does *not* merely involve a temporary loss of a value, good or ‘ought’, but of values and goods which correspond to an *entire* way of life.

It is because there exist two irreconcilable worlds, one of which must be relinquished, that Machiavelli highlights that “one should not be troubled about becoming notorious for those vices without which it is difficult to preserve one’s power” (2003: 55). *Contra* the politician the static DH thesis presents us with – an individual who enters politics as an innocent man, ignorant of the realities of political practice, and who is overburdened by guilt or ‘tragic remorse’ upon acting immorally (akin to someone faced with an unanticipated misfortune) – Machiavelli’s experienced politician *expects* that in politics his choices will *frequently* be between two incompatible ‘oughts’ and involve ‘static’ DH (Tillyris 2015; Hampshire 1989). Such conflicts, Berlin writes, “will be acute and extreme” only for “those who are not prepared to abandon either course”: those, like Walzer’s innocent politician, who erroneously assume “that the two incompatible lives are in fact reconcilable” (1980: 66). Political experience and *virtù* entail knowledge of the messiness of politics – the expectation of unavoidable imperfection, a preparedness to act immorally when politically necessary. *Pace* Walzer, a virtuous politician does not gaze at the future with the innocent hope of salvation; for, he relinquishes his innocence-as-a-disposition and any hope of absolution, upon deciding to lead a political life, before his innocence-as-the-absence-of-wrongdoing is lost.

But, the recognition that virtuous political practice requires one to unlearn the dispositions of a good man upon entering politics creates an obvious problem for the virtuous politician. This relates to the innocent expectations of the community – the moralistic demand that

politicians should be morally good – which are no less popular in democratic societies than in Machiavelli’s era.⁹ I cannot offer an all-encompassing analysis of the roots of this problem here – though the claim that there exists more than one conception of the good, MacIntyre’s critique of modern moral discourse and his postulation that those who lack experience in a practice cannot discern its virtues might be suggestive – but all we have to do to grasp its extent is to recall that even DH theorists, who purport to capture the messiness of politics, contend that there should exist a philosophical space whereby one can be a morally good person and a virtuous politician; “we don’t want to be ruled by men who have lost their souls” Walzer (1973: 176) emphasizes. So, what should the virtuous politician do given such expectations? Failure to cultivate the vices – entering politics as a good and innocent man – entails that one will *not* be a virtuous politician. If he becomes partially vicious and the community becomes aware of this, he will fail again (Tillyris 2015). Machiavelli is clear that since “human conditions do not permit” politicians to be fully virtuous – and since “most people cannot accept the truth about *virtù*” (Mansfield 1996: 19) – virtuous politicians should “know how to avoid the infamy of those vices” which may bring their demise (1998: 62). The qualities of the fox, particularly hypocrisy, play an additional role here: satisfying the goods of politics – rising to power and remaining in it – requires the capacity to conceal one’s vices; to present oneself as “all mercy, all faith, all honesty, all humanity” (Machiavelli 1998: 70).

Pace Walzer, not only should the politician conceal her dirt *after* acting immorally (Tillyris 2015), but the task of hypocritical concealment should commence *at the time* she enters politics. It is unsurprising, then, that the ‘static’ DH thesis cannot capture hypocrisy. For, hypocrisy is a quality that can be *only* grasped in dynamic terms: it constitutes the glue that holds together a virtuous political life. To illustrate this, let us return to my critique of the DH thesis whilst considering the politician’s life as a whole. As suggested, once the politician gets DH once (in the conventional sense), there exists a second-order DH dilemma: the question of whether he should publically reveal his dirt to reclaim his soul, following expiatory punishment or marshal on, satisfy the goods of politics, at the costs of betraying the community’s demand for innocent politicians and of further sinking into the dreary world of politics. The question of choosing between the ends of politics and religious obedience is re-imposed. As indicated, because this question presupposes a second-order DH dilemma, the politician is not immune from wrongdoing as the static thesis suggests. Nor is the action-guiding answer to this question likely to be the one Walzer provides. Following MacIntyre, answering this question requires one to answer the prior question of ‘what story do I find myself a part of?’ If the politician reflects on his life’s narrative, he will realize that since his innocence has been forfeited, and his *telos* is antithetical to salvation, there is no way back: he cannot start from *tabula rasa*, by disassociating himself from politics. But the rejection of politics and the obligations one has incurred will not only carry a remainder; the politician’s life would seem

⁹ I take these expectations for granted but my critique of the DH thesis and the dynamic account entail that these are unrealistic and should be tethered. Whilst I do not intend to explicitly project the dynamic account’s insight to democratic politics here nor do I claim that, especially in the democratic context, we should conceive of a person as *mere* bearer of her role, my point also applies in democracies: one’s on-going political commitment might be jeopardized if one earnestly speaks about his vices and neglects the strategic aspect of one’s public proclamations (c.f. Tillyris 2015). Indeed, given that a virtuous politics, democratic or otherwise, is intertwined with the cultivation and practice of the vices, it is unsurprising that hypocrisy is ubiquitous *especially* in democracies, where politicians are exceedingly dependent on the demos’ support (Grant 1997; Kis 2008; Bellamy 2010). This point is not conditioned on our innocence *per se*. For, even if we accept that politics entails the cultivation and practice of the vices, we prefer not to be told (Hollis 1982). And, politics, democratic or otherwise, involves ongoing power-struggles; a politician’s public statements can be misused by her opponents.

incoherent. One virtue which cannot be captured without reference to the wholeness of human life, MacIntyre suggests, is integrity. Without reference to integrity “the other virtues to some degree lose their point” (AV, 242). This virtue is also captured by Berlin’s Machiavelli:

To retreat, to be overcome by scruples, is to betray your chosen cause. To be a physician is to be a professional, ready to burn, to cauterise ... 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 (1980: 59).

Integrity in one’s practice and life requires the virtuous politician to ‘never look back’: once confronted with this second-order static DH dilemma, he must, to borrow Hollis (1982) and Bellamy (2010) words, wear clean gloves. This need not suggest that political integrity is akin to moral integrity (my claim that hypocrisy is intertwined with political integrity is suggestive). Nor does approaching political life as a whole reinstate an undesirable value-monism. Since our moral reality is messy, composed by plural values and diverse ways of life, “if we allow that [some] Great Goods can collide” and “cannot live together”, the central claim of the dynamic account cannot be evaded by any ‘static’ account, committed to taking moral conflict and pluralism seriously: we “cannot have everything” in theory and in practice (Berlin 1990: 17). Again, the point here is that, the virtues of one ideal character bring about the vices of the other.

4 Conclusion

By locating DH within virtue ethics – specifically MacIntyre’s account in *After Virtue* – I sought to set the foundations for a more nuanced DH framework. Having demonstrated that MacIntyre allows for a richer account of tragedy and DH (as conventionally understood) in ordinary life, I utilized elements from his account to premise Machiavelli’s insights and move beyond the standard, ‘static’ conception of DH in politics. The dynamic account uncovers an inexhaustible tension between two ways of life with their own standards of excellence: virtuous politicians should become partially vicious and no longer innocent. Understood in dynamic terms, DH involves a *paradox of character*, not just a *paradox of action*.

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