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THE ETHICS OF POLITICAL DISSENT

Tony Milligan

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A broadly liberal politics requires political compassion, not simply in the sense of compassion for the victims of injustice but also for opponents confronted through political protest and (more broadly) dissent. There are times when, out of a sense of compassion, a just cause should not be pressed.

There are times when we need to accommodate the dreadfulness of loss for opponents, even when the cause for which they fight is unjust. We may also have to come to terms with the irreversibility of historic injustice and reconcile. Political compassion of this sort carries risks. Pushed too far, it may weaken our commitment to justice through too great a sympathy for those on the other side. It would be convenient if such compassion could be constrained by a clear set of political principles. But principles run the quite different risk of promoting an 'ossified dissent,' unable to respond to change.

In this book, Tony Milligan argues that principles are only a limited guide to dissent in unique, contingent circumstances. They will not tell us how to deal with the truly difficult cases such as the following: Should the Lakota celebrate Thanksgiving? When is the crossing of a picket line justified? What kind of toleration must animal rights advocates cultivate to make progress within a broadly liberal political domain? And how should we respond to the entangling of aspiration toward social justice with anger and prejudice (such as the 'anti-Zionist' discourse)? We may be tempted to answer these questions by presupposing that alignment (the business of choosing sides) is ultimately more important than compassion, but sometimes political compassion trumps alignment. Sometimes, being on the right side is not the most important thing.

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK AND LONDON

First published 2022
by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

and by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this title has been requested

ISBN: 978-0-367-07746-4 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-032-30646-9 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-0-429-02252-4 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9780429022524

Typeset in Sabon
by codeMantra

To Suzanne, for everything.

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Introduction

Alignment may seem fundamental to politics, especially to protest and dissent. Up to a point it is. From an ethical point of view, for much of our recent past, *being on the right side* may often have been more important than almost any other consideration. At least, this has been true in times and places where there was dire human need and also at the most crucial moments of social crisis, such as the period of the rise and fall of fascism across Europe, from the 1920s to the mid-1940s. Those who opposed some of the worst wrongs that humans are capable of tended to identify with the left. Alignment *of this general sort* still matters, but less so now than in the past. It is not obviously more important than political compassion, and the fragmentation of political life in multiple ways makes the very idea of a single overall alignment increasingly difficult to place. It has not gone yet, and like others, I continue to have a particular overall general alignment with the left. But we are arguably going through a process in which the ethics of dissent is increasingly a matter of navigation rather than the choosing of one overall side. The idea of a concentration of causes around a single rally point is still with us, but gradually fading.

In line with this, if someone was to say that "a protest has occurred" but then give us no further information, we might imagine any number of things. We might imagine environmentalists gluing themselves to a major road surface in order to highlight car emissions. Or we might think about supporters of Donald Trump holding a torchlit procession while chanting "You, will not, replace us!" with some of them phasing into "Jews, will not, replace us." Or we might think about some event that borrows heavily from the iconography of 20th-century socialism: banners with images of 19th-century trade's unionists, placards with strips at the top advertising some or other paper of the left, and lots of red everywhere. The diversity of options is itself an indication of movement. Protests and demonstrations of the latter sort have until recently formed an almost irresistible paradigm. A paradigm that is linked to giant social democratic parties which have undergone institutional decline, but also to ideas drawn from social democracy which seem likely

DOI: 10.4324/9780429022524-1

to continue to exert a considerable influence for decades to come, albeit one which is increasingly disentangled from their point of origin.

Diversity of this sort poses a challenge to any attempt to provide an overall characterization of protest and of dissent more generally. What we are likely to be left with will either be reductionist or more piecemeal than the kind of narratives that would have made sense some decades ago. Not all protest is "progressive," the boundaries between left and right are increasingly blurred, a good deal of dissent on the streets and in social media is not even focused directly upon humans, let alone the working class as envisaged in the previous century. There is certainly no unifying conception of progress toward a different society shared by protestors and by those who engage in dissent. Nor is there any prospect that someone or some new political organization might pick up the mantle of the old social democratic parties (or their left critics) and supply such a conception of things. Politics, including the politics of dissent, is clearly and intractably pluralistic. There are many different things going on. Alignments are becoming multiple and piecemeal rather than unitary.

From an ethical point of view, making sense of this plurality of things is a matter of navigating complexities rather than the application of some fixed set of principles. Yet, the analogy of navigation which threads its way through this text should not be taken to indicate some idea of a determinate end goal. As far as I can tell, there is none. There are aspirations for greater justice, opposition to various wrongs, and there is social hope, the hope that things will be better in the future. There are also multiple forms of prejudice, and these too can also drive and shape dissent. None of these things look at all like a great war between classes, or between left and right, or between friends and enemies. The text will try to defuse such ideas. They belong in the past. It is written *from the left* and by someone with a left identity, yet my sense of the distinction between left and right is of something that continues to matter for historical reasons, because of the political traditions that we have inherited and not because of any sort of political necessity. Because of our past and where we have come from, the left/right idea continues to shape a good deal of what we do and how political agents see themselves. But it is a transitory distinction, and the likelihood that it will continue to play any great role as traditions of social democracy recede is unclear. And so it makes sense to identify as left now, while accepting that the idea of such an identity may have very little force in times to come. And those times may not be distant.

In other words, the text tries to acknowledge the tradition of ideas of protest and dissent that we have inherited, while recognizing their contingency and limited shelf life. From a certain point of view, they are ideas that get in the way of an understanding of dissent as much as they might explain it. For example, to see dissent through the prism

of political principles or fundamental political principles or in terms of fundamental or core values will do little to make sense of the diversity of causes and the absence of any single way to join them together into some great force for good or social transformation. Talk about principles, in particular, can be misleading. This is a point that I try to explain in the opening chapter. I do not care about principles. I care about people, and animals, and ecosystems, and about humanity as a moral community. It also strikes me that these are the things that humans generally care about, but our care for them has tended to be expressed indirectly, through appeals to histories and traditions, and (again) principles which then take on a life of their own. Of course, if we must have principles at all, as hints, clues, and reminders, then it is better if we have good and useful principles rather than principles of some other sort. But the principles, the rules for how to act, have no special worth of their own.

Saying this is consistent with accepting all manner of side constraints which are part of anything that we might view as consistent with being a good agent within a liberal democracy or within any sort of political system that has many or most of the good features of the latter. We do not, for example, slaughter infants in public squares. But from side-constraints of this sort we can hardly build up some overall ethic, as if the side-constraints were really foundations or something that tells us a great deal about what we are. It is a concern with this, with *what we are*, that provides the overall arc of the text. The things that matter to us include justice but also love, strategic advantage but also grief. We do not stop being the kind of creatures that we are when we step into the political arena or when we attempt to speak the truth to power. Yet, a good deal of *what we are* finds little place within political discourse, especially within accounts of protest and dissent. An exception here is the literature of the dissident, which does seem to bring political agents face-to-face with human frailties, with our need for truth, and with our sense of loss in the face of political events. Dissent within liberal democracies is not, for the most part, like that, although we can see a good deal that we might miss by picturing dissent within liberal democracies against the backdrop of an understanding of this more demanding kind of dissent. This forms the main body of Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 looks at the very idea of bringing ethics and politics together, particularly in light of various kinds of realpolitik and skepticism about doing so, together with a legacy of reluctance on the left to address questions of ethics in anything other than a consequentialist/means-ends manner. A legacy which has encouraged movement from left ideas of political conflict into enthusiasm for Carl Schmitt's far-right skepticism about "moralizing" the real arena of conflict between friend and enemy. The spirit of Schmitt seems to be alive and well and living on the internet, an arena where rapid and absolutist polarization as well as extreme animosity easily takes hold. I confess to having little enthusiasm for this

line of thought. It does seem to be too close to an afterlife for the ideas that have come to us through social democracy, but with increasing blurring of the distinction between left and right, driven by a desire to attack the moralizing political center. That is to say, I do not think that we can reasonably evade ethical deliberation of a fairly deep sort in a world where the lines of conflict have become clearly more complex than they seemed for much of the 20th century. Again, this is navigation rather than mere alignment.

Chapter 4 tries to tackle a mythology which places alignment at the heart of ethical appraisal of political agents. Put bluntly, there is a long-standing assumption that people on "our" side on some issue or set of issues are the good ones. People on the other side are morally challenged or ethically compromised in some general way. With some exceptions (political saints, extremist opponents of the better features of liberal democracy, and those who openly embrace and campaign for some terrible prejudice), I do not think that political alignment is a good guide to personal virtue. While there are significant differences of character between agents, these differences do not map at all well onto political alignment. It is conceivable that they might do so under different circumstances, but conditions of stable liberal democracy tend toward uniformity in ethical standing with different causes and political configurations having their fair share of heroes, villains, and ordinary people like myself and like most readers. My support for this is not intended to be a case of delusional political humility but an appraisal of where we actually stand. Given the ways in which social media are used by agents of all political hues, it has become much harder to persuade ourselves that virtue is to be found in one place and viciousness primarily in another. Given this, we cannot plausibly appeal to political alignment in order to assess charges of racism, or antisemitism, or transphobia. Prejudice of all sorts can be found everywhere and not as an occasional exception, but as something with a ready audience prepared to justify it by appeal to some set of deep principles and admirable fundamental values.

A good deal of the text is taken up with using ethical concepts that tend to be neglected when we think about politics, in general, and dissent, in particular. This emerges out of a familiar concern with the loss of concepts in our pursuit of simplification and search for ethical foundations. The concepts in question (like courage, compassion, and hope) are familiar within liberal democracies, even though they often have a longer history. Yet, it would be problematic to imagine that the political life of liberal democracies is self-enclosed or that liberal democracies automatically supply all of the conceptual resources that we need in order to make sense of protest, dissent, and political life generally. Chapter 5 considers a candidate for the inclusion of a concept which has come from the outside, the concept of *ahimsa* which has been particularly prominent as an insider term within animal rights protest. The chapter weighs

up the advantages and disadvantages of appeals to *ahimsa* as well as the ethical dangers of appropriation.

Overall, the text places a continuing emphasis upon the importance of political compassion and making sense of political opponents in ways that do not aggrandize *us* or unduly diminish *them*. Chapter 6 considers the risks of an attitude that might be too understanding and so worried about the experience of loss for opponents that tackling injustice and public shows and iconography of prejudice might be downgraded. It will draw a distinction between genuine political grief that we might have to accept as the price of change and a mere sense of political grievance by those who wish to continue prejudice or introduce it into political life. Genuine political grief may call upon what we owe to one another, even where it involves grief over the loss of an identity that we associate with wrongdoing. Mere political grievance makes no such call.

The final chapter will focus upon problematic and more promising options for politicizing the concept of love and the naturalness of doing so. What drives many of our attitudes toward one another, toward dissent, and toward the possibility that things might be better in the future than they have been in the past is an attitude toward humanity *as a shared moral community* (rather than humanity thought of as a species with some fixed biological essence). While we do not love our enemies and while we do not ordinarily love our political opponents or political allies, a background attitude toward the importance of our moral community (and even any post-human successor) underlies a good deal of what we say, do, and protest over. This is not respect or duty but looks more like an attitude of love. We may not notice it or feel comfortable talking about it, but it is there. It is built into our concern for future generations. It is also something that may easily be covered over, concealed, lost sight of, or forgotten in our preoccupation with longstanding hostilities and with ossified patterns of dissent.

1 The Fable of the Colonial Ethicists

I A thought experiment

Let us imagine a task of an unusual sort. Imagine that we have been asked to set out an overall structure for ethics. We have not been asked to design "an ethic," but rather to outline the overall shape of ethics. Others will then fill in the detail. Let us also suppose that our task is constrained by the existence of a colonial system in which various subordinated peoples are subject to direct political control by a dominant nation. In other words, colonialism in the classic sense. Our outline has to work within this colonial context and it must make room for at least some of the values which prevail within the dominant power. There must be appropriate slots into which the dominant view of what is right and good can then be inserted. And so, we are not just designers, but also what might be called "colonial ethicists."

We are not, however, colonially minded in the Francisco Pizzaro sense. We do not believe that men on horseback have a right of conquest. Rather, we think of ourselves as a protective barrier against despotic forms of domination. We do not control but protect. Or so our story goes. The evils of earlier times are abhorrent to us. We cannot imagine committing them and object when they are done in our name. Our business model is not piracy practiced on a grand scale. Rather, we have a broadly liberal outlook. Freedoms, democracy, and the rule of law matter too up to a point, although some violations are to be expected as a problem of scale. Overall, we regard our colonial system as a way of helping less advanced peoples to be raised up from their backward condition and as a form of protection from the misfortunes they would face without us. We are all better together. But the "we" in question is a differentiated we. One within which a certain kind of othering occurs. "They" are moral infants who will, in time, become more like us. This is to be thought of as progress. While our remit as the designers of ethics does not extend to detailed commitments over content, the structure of the ethics that we propose will presuppose a benevolent mindset of this sort.

DOI: 10.4324/9780429022524-2

Among ourselves, we the designers will argue about various matters; but one thing we agree upon is that the most basic standards of ethics should be universal. Again, we leave others to decide what these standards are. But once in place, they must be rolled out everywhere. After all, if we are preparing the backward peoples of world to live like us, be like us, and make judgments of right and wrong like us, then a universal set of commitments does seem to be required. It would be odd to say, "We live in one way, but perhaps it is better if you live differently." Such an attitude would cut across the project of moral progress. These poor people would never learn to be like us, and that would be a bad thing. We take these responsibilities seriously. The lure of the universal is also thought of as the lure of democracy itself. It was part of our own culture's progress out of the darkness, out of times when one set of rules applied to kings and nobles, another set applied to priests and monks, further sets applied to freemen in the towns, and then to everyone else. Hardly a democratic arrangement. And so, in the name of democracy and an eventual equality of sorts, we decide that it is the best of all things to export a single set of good ethical rules to the less enlightened portions of the world. Our attempt to design a structure for ethics will itself be shaped by the ethical values, which will then slot conveniently into position. From the start, we are already in the middle of things.

Inconveniently, this presupposed universalizability of ethics comes with constraints of its own. It will be placed under strain if ethics involves too many different things or if it has to work regularly with too many concepts. A large conceptual repertoire might then come to mean one thing in one place, but something different elsewhere. If that were to happen, there might be very little that we could do to hold the line. After some shared deliberation, we come to the conclusion that the best safeguard for a universal system of ethics is that it should also be compact and structurally divided between a small number of foundational values and a wider variety of derivative commitments. There should be something manageable in the foundations, and we should also be able to determine when something concerns our basic values and when something is more open to question and discussion. What is applied will then stand a better chance of remaining uniform.

Finally, it will make sense if the small number of foundational values is applied in a consistent way. Otherwise, the universal standing of ethics will again be placed in danger by the inconvenient messiness of the world. To help ensure their consistent application, several of our number argue that there should be a simple set of rules for deciding what should be done, what should be avoided, and what falls outside the scope of ethics. These rules should apply everywhere, in the same

way that the rules of mathematics apply everywhere, irrespective of who performs the calculations. While we all like this idea, and some of us want to adopt it, others object that our design for ethics is starting to look a little constraining, and this will make it less attractive. Imperfect humans may reject good guidance if they see it only as control. Constraint creates rebels, dissidents, and dissent. People may be lured by the appeal of rule-breaking if they think of it as a special kind of freedom. This worry strikes all of us as reasonable. And so, to avoid overtones of constraint, we place great emphasis upon an idea of personal autonomy. Rather than using a terminology of "rules," we refer to "principles." Rather than presenting ethics as a matter of subservience and control, we paint a picture of agent autonomy, the free embracing of universal principles, and the finding of freedom through this embracing of universal principles. By embracing the universal principles, agents obey only their own truest rational selves and so remain free. As before, the principles will simply be rules under a different name.

Having outlined the structure of ethics, we leave others to identify the right set of foundational values and the ethical principles through which we can all live in accordance with them. Other agents can now build the theories which will help explain why their preferred sets of values and principles are the right ones to adopt. Disputes about these matters will be intense. So ends the fable.

II The limitations of principles

For those who have some knowledge of 20th-century philosophical ethics, parts of this picture will be uncomfortably familiar. The section of the fable about universalizability will look close to Immanuel Kant's *categorical imperative* on one of its formulations: "act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law" (Gregor 1996: 73). It may look even closer to the attempts by Richard Hare to provide an objective and demythologized account of the language of morals, itself set down during the declining years of the British Empire. The language of "universalizability" is drawn from Hare and from his view that "ethics (i.e., the logic of moral language) is an immensely powerful engine for producing moral agreement" (Hare 1963: 97). For Hare, those who failed to apply universal rules in a consistent way were either abandoning the ground of ethics or else they were guilty of a logical error. An important difference between these two thinkers is that Kant favored deontological principles (focusing upon rights and duties) over principles formulated in any other terms. Hare believed that universalizability would work best with utilitarian principles slotted in as the content, framed by structural ideas

drawn from Kant. Up to a point, they sat at opposite sides of the room. But this, too, is the kind of thing that the fable of the colonial ethicists will lead us to expect. On either formulation, there is something intuitively plausible about the whole approach. It comes close to the idea that we should treat others as we ourselves would want to be treated, just so long as the circumstances are roughly the same. In fact, the structure of ethics set out in the fable does have persuasive force. We can imagine courses on ethics covering much the same ground, without any mention of colonies, empire, or the raising up of backward peoples so that they learn to follow in our footsteps. In such courses, universalizability would still figure, but these other things would not be mentioned.

In spite of its plausibility, I want to suggest that there is something very wrong with the entire view of ethics set out in the fable. And insofar as it is close to the approach of the dominant ethical theories in the English-speaking world during the 19th and 20th centuries (deontology, consequentialism, and to a lesser extent virtue ethics), we should also feel uneasy about these theories too. Perhaps this claim sounds a little more radical than it really is. Theory building of the sort at stake in the fable has primarily belonged to the analytic tradition of ethics. But within this tradition, the very idea that any single theory can do most of the work of ethics has been eroding for decades in the face of challenges by a succession of figures, from Bernard Williams (2010), to Alasdair MacIntyre (2007), Charles Taylor (1992), and Lawrence Blum (1994). A multiplicity of other kinds of ethics, beyond the analytic tradition, have also made their way into our ways of thinking and speaking about the right and the good, duty, virtues, care, and love. And the greatest of these in my own work has been love.

Some of the concepts and ideas which have helped to open ethics up have come from outside of the West. A concept that I appeal to with some caution, partly because of an overestimation of a cohesive *here*, but also because of an implied unity of *elsewhere*. The unity of the East breaks down under analysis. Okakura Kakuzō's *The Ideals of the East with Special Reference to the Art of Japan* (1903) notoriously opened with an announcement that "Asia is one" (1903: 1), but this was as much a political aspiration as any sort of descriptive fact. At the time when Okakura penned the statement, there was a broad struggle to constrain the cultural influences of the West and he was at the forefront of this struggle. The shared need to assert the value of the non-West has always never quite transformed multiplicity into oneness. When I refer to the West and to liberal democracy within it, no projected historic cohesion of the East is presupposed. Western cohesion is perhaps somewhat greater, but largely a product of modernity, both in its democratizing aspect and in its production of racism, domination, and successive reconstructions of antisemitism (Lao 2020). And so, when I appeal to the West as a concept of convenience, I am not suggesting that the liberal

democracies of the West are the culmination of some set of historical necessities stretching back to Herodotus and summed up Hegel's idea that world history moves in a particular geographical direction. Nor do I wish to situate contemporary dissent within the West in a context shaped by a 19th-century overestimation of the uniformity of precapitalist European politico-economic organization. An overestimation promoted by Marx and based partly upon projections of Japanese feudalism back onto European history.

Yet these and other problematic ideas about the West are present within the philosophical traditions that I draw from. They are embedded within familiar conceptions of ethics and even within practices of dissent whose Westernness is all too obvious. Here, I have in mind practices of dissent such as those shaped by social democracy. A tradition now in its *late* stage and one which has long since achieved high levels of integration into capitalist state structures. Social democracy draws upon racism, and in the case of the social democratic left, upon populist antisemitism, as shapers of dissent as well as its target. It is difficult to get out from under the shadow of such ideas. Perhaps it is impossible to do so fully. They spread in all directions and extend off into the distance. We may accept that social democracy and its related traditions are coming to an end, yet we cannot at present live beyond it, even though that is where we may want to be. But when I say this and appeal to a "we," perhaps there is a risk of slipping back into the same old view of ethics, although what I am trying to do is to use it as an invitation to reflect upon common predicaments and shared vulnerabilities. In the words of Bernard Williams, "It is not a matter of 'I' telling 'you' what I and others think, but of my asking you to consider to what extend you and I think some things and perhaps need to think others" (Williams 1993: 171).

The multiplicity of everywhere else has yet to fully impact upon Western traditions of ethics, even in the case of the authors cited above who have done most to shift us away from the kind of ethics that is pictured in the fable. There is an awareness of the problem, even if we lack any complete solution. Alasdair MacIntyre's introduction to the Hebrew translation of his classic *After Virtue* (1981) suggests that readers might substitute Maimonides when he appeals to Aquinas. An imperfect fix, and obviously so. Yet it shows an appreciation of the need to appeal beyond the West with its roots in Christianity as well as empire. Yet awareness is not overcoming or *allowing to fall away*. As yet, ethics in the tradition that this text is part of remains lineally bound to ways of thinking which are shaped by the idea of a Western intellectual canon with all its weaknesses and strengths. A canon that includes Kant as a towering figure of modernity, together with the legacies outlined in the fable.

In saying this, I am not claiming that everything is up for grabs. I am not saying that the legacy of modernity's Western canon should be set aside rather than worked through. Least of all, am I claiming that the

idea of truth has no place in a contemporary ethics and that multiple perspectives are all that we have to go on? After all, there are no circumstances in which the roasting of infants in village squares will be tolerable. No viable perspectives from which it will come out as acceptable. There is a truth about this matter. Similarly, there are no cases of virtuous racism, tolerant transphobia, or admirable antisemitism. There are truths about these matters too. From an ethical point of view, some things do carry over into all cases, across time and irrespective of place. But examples of this sort are not a good overall guide to what a contemporary ethics should look like. Rather, they concern what are sometimes called "platitudes," familiarity with which is part of our grasp of concepts and not just the concepts of ethics (Smith 2005: 32).

There are rudimentary claims that anyone in the business of ethics is likely to agree to and that most non-ethicists will also regard as noncontroversial: friendship is something to be cherished, murder is reprehensible, and rape is not a good thing. Reflection on these simple ideas may give the misleading impression that the same core or foundational ethical rules apply everywhere. Yet these are not foundations, but only side-constraints. Some are fixed by the requirements of our being social animals or fixed by the kinds of societies in which we now live. Others are set by the avoidance of the more blatant forms of prejudice and irrationality in our judgments about our fellow human beings. A few concern actions which could be taken as indications of psychological disorder rather than difference. Acceptance that side-constraints hold does not imply that there is any single ethic that might be deduced from them and then universally applied. It does not entail that there is some set of foundational values that might be compactly formulated and used to shape some manageable set of principles. As far as we can tell, ethics has no foundations of that sort. It has never had foundations of that sort and does not seem to need them. When we have diligently learned our ethical theories from Plato to Aristotle and from Kant to John Stuart Mill, this idea may initially seem a little odd. But it helps to bring our best abstract thinking about ethics closer to an understanding of what ethical life is actually like. Abandoning the very idea that we have a compact set of foundational values and an associated set of special rules or principles is also no barrier to thinking about ethics as the sort of thing that might involve knowledge. After all, knowledge is rarely structured in such a foundational way. Bodies of knowledge are not buildings, even if their transmission often calls upon the imagery of foundations and applications. The teaching of a "foundations" course in some particular kind of theory is a matter of educational process, not the mapping of knowledge structures themselves.

Comments of this sort may help to convey a set of intentions, but they do not remove the influence of colonial modes of thinking. Even when we know that they are present somewhere, we are not necessarily in a

position to say where or to fully remove them. Such influences cannot be controlled through naming or by adding a subtitle and saying that it is "a postcolonial analysis" or a "decolonizing narrative." My claims about having achieved this are minimal. The text does not entirely escape from the problem that the fable is designed to draw out. Yet it involves a further step away from the kind of ethics that is more obviously suited to colonial times. Besides which, the canonical texts of Aristotle, Kant, Mill, and others still have important roles to play and multiple roles to play, even if they cannot ground everything in the way that they were once supposed to. Their work can help us to sustain a rich conceptual repertoire as opposed to an impoverished one. In line with this, I will look more to the advantages of such a repertoire rather than to compact foundational values or to principles for action. Principles are rule-like, while concepts are more varied in the ways that they may be put to work. And the bundle of concepts that I will appeal to includes *social hope, political grief, a shared humanity, puritanism*, and *love*. Although to speak of them as a bundle of concepts can miss something important. Not all concepts are equal, and these concepts run deeper than most. Deeper than talk about *left* and *right* or about *history and traditions*, although such talk can play a useful if limited role. Given the short history of talk about *left* and *right*, it is slightly odd that we continue to address matters of politics so much in these terms and have so little to say about the experience of grief in political contexts or how love and the political may sometimes be brought together. Grief is deep and love is deep, but the contrast between left and right as well as various principles and values associated with it are more transitory. They are not integral to *being human* in the sense of belonging to our moral community rather than in some biological sense that might presuppose a special human essence. We are rather formed within shifting communities and through shifting social relations which make our sense of belonging possible and our experiences of grief almost unbearable. Talk about left and right and about associated sets of principles are more superficial. They are about alignment when we need something closer to *pathfinding* or *navigation*. Or even *orientation*, a term that recurs in the postmodernist work of Frederic Jameson (1991) to describe our predicament in a time when certain kinds of utopian direction-giving master narratives have fallen away, while capitalism itself has entered its final stages and become late capitalism. A plausible framing of matters, if we get away from the Marxist idea that socialism rather than a significantly different set of social inequalities, will now follow.

This text can be understood in the light of this predicament of having to find ways without the reassurance of any determinate categorical framework of ethical rules. It is not a restatement or revision of a set of core or basic principles, but it is partly an exercise in the recovery of concepts. Including those we have been tempted to exile from the

political domain in favor of the view that politics is shaped by some great conflict between friends and enemies. A contrast which requires fewer ways of understanding. This idea of a recovery of concepts owes something to ethics in the tradition of Wittgenstein, a great anti-foundational thinker, and to concerns that simplification and streamlining can lead to a loss of concepts (Diamond 1988) or to the treatment of thick concepts (i.e., concepts replete with meanings) as if they were much thinner. Niklas Forsberg puts the point nicely when he says: "the fact that parts of our language are lost on us means that we have disabled our possibilities of self-reflection and so self-understanding" (Forsberg 2015: 5). In line with this approach, I will assume the need for a complex repertoire of ethical concepts to help make sense of politics in general and dissent, in particular. And I will try to show that such a repertoire may tell us more about what it is to be a political agent and a political animal than any set of principles could ever tell us. Yet concepts can be elusive. The concept of dissent itself is far from clear or easily captured. In the second chapter, I will attempt to make sense of it through a contrast with the idea of *the dissident* based upon soviet era Eastern Europe.

However, the main focus of the text will be Western and European political traditions and authors operating within the context of liberal democracies. There is also a continuing thread of thought about late social democracy and the worldwide erosion of the socialist movements that were so influential during the 19th and 20th centuries, but which are now undergoing an uneven decline. While there is a widespread realization that the principles to which social democracy appealed in the early 1900s cannot guide actions in the 21st century, social democracy itself retains a strong ideological influence which looks set to continue long after its core institutions have become little more than bureaucratic machines grinding on in the name of ideals that they do not practice. This is not to say that the cluster of 19th-century political visions which sought an end to capitalism were wrong about its long-term trajectory. However, the idea of a postcapitalist society played only an occasional and ambiguous role during the 20th century heyday of social democracy. Nineteenth-century social democrats were trying to change the world. Their 20th-century counterparts were trying to continue traditions that they believed to be of great and ongoing value. Continuing a tradition in this way involves a kind of conservatism. The irony here is that capitalism could not be displaced in the 19th century when its demise was greatly anticipated, but displacement may well be what is happening now, albeit slowly. The most likely end to capitalism has turned out to be a by-product of extensive social and technological change rather than proletarian revolution. And so, while critical of social democracy, itself an orphaned child of the colonial era, I do not deny the value of thinking about what comes next after capitalism, when it is no longer helpful to think of economic systems as largely continuous with the world

described by Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and Karl Marx. A world shaped heavily by a dynamic of wage labor and capital.

As the latter dynamic has been displaced, the context for dissent has changed. It cannot now be thought of as an adjunct or an "on the streets" radicalization of social democracy or as something that tends to collapse into social democracy after some initial enthusiasm. Such an idea would not have been out of place only three decades ago. And it would have made a great deal of sense in the 1970s and the 1980s. That world is now gone. Yet social democracy continues to cast its own long shadow at the level of political culture. It may be entirely possible for someone to imagine that they are rejecting the entire tradition of social democracy while drawing from the sort of ethics set out in the fable of the colonial ethicists, and hence from the same pool of ideas from which social democracy emerged. Any one of us might hold that the old left was too obsessed with *principles*, too constrained by the latter, when they should have been focusing upon *values* instead, or fundamental values, or core values. Indeed, the webpages for European social democratic parties over the past decade have begun to move in this direction, with a great deal of talk about the values at the heart of their politics. But this involves only a shift in emphasis. And it is also difficult to imagine that the most general values held by supporters of social democratic parties are both cohesive and vastly different from the comparable values of any other group of agents who have lived their lives within liberal democracies. The latter are systems within which freedom (liberty), equality (of some sort), and identification with social interests (fraternity or even solidarity) are valued by more or less all of us. If there is a common yet unique value in the case of social democracy, it is a commitment to the tradition itself as a thing of value.

III Acceptance of messiness

Above, I have suggested the limitations of principles as a guide to action. They will not do the work required if we are to find viable pathways through the difficulties that political agents routinely face. A brief example may help to consolidate the point. In 1969, the profile and cohesiveness of the gay rights movement underwent a massive boost as a result of the Stonewall Riots. A routine police raid upon a gay bar in Greenwich Village, New York, resulted in a running battle in the streets as the occupants of nearby gay bars poured out to help fight off the police. This is an iconic moment in the LGBTQ history. But what principle might we draw from it beyond the simple platitude that gay rights should be defended? Might we draw the principle that gay community activities must be protected from the authorities and that the activities and mode of protection is ultimately for members of the community themselves to decide? That would be a useful rule of thumb, but little more. There are

cases in which any such principle would break down. In 1981, gay men in San Francisco and Los Angeles began to die in disproportionate numbers from a mystery illness whose nature and existence was disputed. San Francisco's bathhouses, well-known hookup points for a vibrant gay community, were at the center of transmission. At the time, epidemiologist Don Francis encountered a combination of hostility, suspicion, and (less often) support as he tried to figure out what was going on. To many, the targeting of the bathhouses looked like a scientific spin on the same old thing. The Stonewall raid all over again. Isolated voices said otherwise. A minority. Bill Krause, a gay activist and liaison for the local Democratic congressman, tried to push the illness into the public domain. A move that involved addressing issues about lifestyle and what it meant to talk about gay liberation. Above all, Krause wanted the bathhouses to be shut down. For Krause, reluctance to move on the issue stemmed from a mistaken belief that only gay men were in danger. Within five years, Krause himself would die of AIDS. At the time, he was accused of having "strayed into the enemy camp," having internalized homophobia and even becoming a "sexual Nazi." The accusations were not simply there in the press. They were made on the streets of San Francisco and at demonstrations (Shilts 2011). By 2020, more than 36 million people were dead and almost twice as many were HIV positive (UNAIDS 2021).

A rough and ready rule of thumb, even when useful on many occasions, presents multiple dangers when ossified into a fixed political principle. We may, of course, say that all principles come with a *ceteris paribus* clause. They say that such and such a thing should be done or not done, *all other things being equal*. And this is true. But the framing of matters in terms of principles can simply mislead once the rule of principle itself is taken to have some sort of independent value. At best, treating judgments about what is to be done as a matter of weighing up a principle seems like a very roundabout way of saying that we care about other people. It is a way of speaking that risks losing sight of their importance. Political agents, who fall foul of this risk and actually do lose sight of what really matters, can end up appealing to the *overriding* importance of principles, such as the need to defend freedom of public assembly, even during pandemics. This happened on multiple occasions and on an international scale during the COVID-19 outbreak of 2020–2022. Moreover, circumstances are often *less equal*, less uniform than we might think. The conditions under which any given principle might be a poor guide to action are many, not few.

This is the case not only with platitudes, but with principles which are integral to familiar political traditions. Consider, for example, one of most cherished social democratic principles, one of the principles closely associated with its history and traditions: the rejection of crossing picket lines under any circumstances. The English trade union leader

and former member of the Communist Party Bob Crowe summed up the standing of this rule during a dispute in 2004, "I was brought up according to Labour movement principles and to believe that the 11th commandment is 'Thou shalt not cross a picket line'" (Maguire 2004). This may be a plausible rule of thumb. Trade unionism is, in general, a good thing. And it is difficult to imagine any approximation to a good society that did not involve some counterpart of this tradition. However, when it is asserted with this level of absolute commitment, the rule can involve a kind of *thoughtlessness*, a dispensing of any deep ethical consideration of the issues involved in strike action. This matters because the rule on crossing picket lines does not have the same sort of standing as moral platitudes and *cannot* have such standing because issues of pay bargaining do not have the depth of importance that killing infants or rape have. It cannot be a fixed side-constraint, in the sense that they are fixed side-constraints. Moreover, while strikes are often justified, there are also multiple cases in which they promote injustice, involve outbursts of prejudice, victimize the weak, and are geared to the interests of more affluent sections of the workforce at the expense of temporary staff and the least well-off. What, for example, would we think of a strike to temporarily shore up pension rights for senior academics, when the funding to do so will require reallocation of funds that would otherwise have gone to academics on temporary contracts? Would it change matters if we then add in the prospect of union complicity in the waiver of their statutory employment rights to enable redundancy for employees on repeat temporary contracts but with three or four years of service? Such cases are hardly beyond the bounds of reasonable possibility. They may even match up reasonably well with familiar disputes which end in notional success enabled through concealed redundancies. An 11th commandment to respect picket lines in circumstances of this sort side-steps all need for any deep deliberation about such matters. Are the temporary members of staff supposed to respect picket lines when they know very well that their jobs have been weighed in the balance and deemed to be less important. Can they reasonably be expected to become complicit in their own misfortune? And how should political agents respond when there is no just cause or when just cause and inexcusable prejudice have become inextricably entangled in the course of some trade union dispute? Trade unionism protects employees against employers, but it often protects some employees more than others and can be used to protect privileged status in the face of more disadvantaged groups.

Given this, the principle of never crossing picket lines or always joining strikes will stand up poorly in the case of a racist strike against a claimed encroachment of Blacks upon white jobs or against dilution by unskilled Catholics who supposedly threaten a deskilling of occupations normally reserved for Protestants. It will stand up poorly whenever there is a strike against encroachment by those who happen to be outside the

dominant sections of the labor force. There have been many strikes of this sort. They include the iconic 1922 miner's strike in South Africa, the "Rand Revolt," led by the South African Labour Party and forming a pivotal moment in the development of the Apartheid system. The strike is notorious for the use of the slogan "Workers of the World Fight, and Unite for a White South Africa" (Marks 2019). While officially disavowing the racist aspects of the strike, which included the killing of Blacks, the Communist Party was heavily involved and claimed that the class component could be differentiated from the racist component. Blacks, who were attacked as a threat to trade unionism were not then attacked on racist grounds. The distinction was, of course, entirely spurious. The strike itself was focused upon a claimed need to reinforce a color bar, which is precisely what happened two years later when a coalition of the Afrikaner-based National Party and the Labour Party reinforced the color bar, recognized white trade unions, and laid the foundations for systematic racist segregation. To their credit, the Communist Party did shift position in a drive to gain support within the Black working class. However, it is only one example of many cases from this period when strike action and prejudice were strongly entwined.

As another case, we might think of the Berlin Transport Strike of 1932, jointly coordinated by the Communist Party and the Nazi Party through its recently formed National Socialist Factory Cell Organization (NSBO) as the largest of several collaborations between the two. Walter Ulbrecht of the Berlin KDP (Communist Party of Germany) and Joseph Goebbels of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) coordinated the action (Stern 1965). The strike played a pivotal role in securing mass working-class support for the Nazis. The principle of never crossing picket lines will also work poorly in the case of multiple anti-Catholic strikes which have taken place in Northern Ireland, the most notorious occurring in 1974, complete with the emergence of Protestant workers' councils committed to the prevention of any power sharing between the two communities. Catholic parties had won four out of the 11 seats on the executive of a new Northern Ireland Assembly, and seven went to Protestant parties (Wood 2006). Catholic representation was accepted, but their participation in actual government was rejected. The strike succeeded in its goal. It was impractical for anyone to cross picket lines, given their armed paramilitary enforcement. Had it been at all practical, it would have been the bravest and best thing to do. All of these cases concern strikes which were supported by much of the left at the time and only opposed in retrospect. They were supported because they took the form of strike action, irrespective of the prejudices at stake. Nor it is plausible to say that they were a perversion of trade unionism. From its origins, the latter has involved protection from a multiplicity of directions, particularly in the case of craft unions of one sort or another, for example, engineers. Protection against employers

has intertwined with protection against the unskilled, Blacks, Catholics, and (as in Berlin in 1932) Jews. The role of antisemitism in the new unionism of the late Victorian era, which gave birth to the modern trade union movement, is only now coming to light. In places like the East End of London, the idea of protecting workers' rights was heavily directed against the double threat of unscrupulous employers and Jewish immigrants (Virdee 2017). Again, the point is about a principle which ignores the mixed nature of trade unionism and the lack of ethical determinacy that strike action has.

The problem of what we might call reactionary strikes and strikes with racist overtones or directly racist and discriminatory goals was well recognized and discussed during the early decades of modern trade unionism. Blindness to the problem is more recent. Lenin's criticism of trade union consciousness in *What Is to Be Done?* (1902) pulled few punches about the issue, and argued that trade unionism alone was so prone to discrimination and sectionalism that socialist ideas had to be brought to the working class from the outside. Booker T. Washington pressed a similar point about the vulnerability of trade unionism to operate as a vehicle for racism. In "The Negro and the Labor Unions" (1913), he explained why persons of color were so often at odds with white traditions of social and economic protest focused upon the workplace:

> Another reason why Negroes are prejudiced against the unions is that, during the past few years, several attempts have been made by the members of labor unions which do not admit Negroes to membership, to secure the discharge of Negroes employed in their trades. For example, in March 1911, the white firemen on the Queen and Crescent Railway struck as the result of a controversy over the Negro firemen employed by the road. The white firemen, according to the press reports, wanted the Negro firemen assigned to the poorest runs. Another report stated that an effort was made to compel the railway company to get rid of the Negro firemen altogether.
>
> (Washington 1913)

His attention to the problem was with a view toward gradually reducing the seemingly intractable conflict. More militant figures such as W. E. B. Du Bois were equally aware of the difficulty, but believed that it could be overcome on terms which were simultaneously less gradualist and more sympathetic to trade union goals and working-class organization. Subsequent generations of historians, influenced by the Civil Rights Movement, have found more in common with the ideals of Du Bois. But this does not mean that Washington's appraisal of the intractability of racism within the trade unions in the 1910s, its standing as something which could only be mitigated *up to a point*, was actually mistaken.

A presupposition that strikes will generally be worth supporting and not implicated in various kinds of injustice underlies the principle concerning picket lines and a primacy of trade union solidarity over all other things. Yet there have always been moments when the deniability of injustice and prejudice has no longer seemed plausible. Moments when it has simply broken down. Again, not because trade unionism is a bad thing, but because it is not a determinately good thing and cannot always be relied upon to uphold justice rather than injustice. Consider the less iconic left events of 1968, when thousands of London Dockers, with strong support from Smithfield Market where the far right were a growing influence, twice went on strike in support of Enoch Powell and carried placards with slogans such as "Back Britain, not Black Britain" after Powell's sacking from the Conservative Party's Shadow Cabinet following an openly racist speech. Powell had warned of England's future and invoked the image of "The River Tiber, flowing with much blood" should immigration continue. Powell adopted the device of claiming to quote "a man on the street" to warn that "In this country in 15 or 20 years' time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man" (Schofield 2015: 234). Micky Fenn of the Communist Party, a member of the rank-and-file Unofficial Shop Stewards' Committee for London Docks, later described the resulting confusion in the face of an apparent anomaly, a case where the principle of uniformly supporting strikes and respecting picket lines simply could not be relied upon. On Fenn's account, which dates from his time in one of the Trotskyist groupings after having left the Communist Party, nobody who went to work would have been called a scab, but there was a vote of the Unofficial Committee in the Connaught pub and a show of hands favored taking a day off. "I think on reflection I was wrong. I felt I should have gone to work, but I didn't. But the issue was about collective responsibility as well, even though we wasn't part of the collective" (Fekete 2016: 57). Fenn's subsequent assessment was, I will suggest, correct and a difficult admission for a lifelong trade unionist to make. It is also consistent with a more critical Leninist influenced attitude toward the principle that has periodically surfaced on the far left rather than inside the mainstream social democratic parties. The right thing to do was to cross the picket line rather than respecting an overtly racist strike. The rule was not as important as the issue of racism. The political embarrassment of crossing a picket line was not as important as racism. It was, of course, possible to join the strike and hand out leaflets explaining the wrongs of racism, and this was one favored option. But in doing so, those who respected the strike and did not cross the picket line were party to one of the most dangerous acts of mass organized racism in UK history, with predictable and clear linkages to the subsequent growth of neo-Nazi organizations and racist violence.

As stated before, none of this involves a denial of the obvious point that trade unionism has overall been an important and socially constructive tradition of dissent. But all these cases involved matters of vastly greater import than any rule of thumb about how to be a good trade unionist. They can also help us to attend to the risks of appealing to a principle in order to evade moral responsibility, ethical thoughtfulness in difficult cases, and the burden of making hard and sometimes unpopular choices. As the role of trade unionism evolves, it seems unlikely that this principle will be sustained with anything like the same rigidity encouraged by its founders and embraced by adherents of social democracy during its heyday. Unless we know about the prevailing political culture, the culture of dissent at the time, and the pressures toward solidarity even in the course of wrongdoing, it may even become difficult for 21st-century political agents to fathom why a rule for good trade union practice ever seemed more important than racism, antisemitism, or anti-Catholic sectarianism. And while we might understand why a rule of this sort became so strongly rooted in the late 19th and early 20th century under conditions where there was a continual threat of actual poverty, this is hardly a characterization of the circumstances under which most contemporary trade unionism operates in liberal democracies. An impoverished proletariat may need overriding traditions of solidarity, but a relatively affluent workforce prioritizing trade unionism over all other considerations is a different matter.

For any given principle, similar problem cases may be brought forward. The world is insufficiently orderly and stable over time for a fixed set of principles to operate as anything more than a broad set of hints, clues, and reminders. During pandemics, times of social tensions, or at moments of political crises, fixed rules can mislead in dangerous ways. However, when it comes to the ethics of dissent, the limitation of principles is only part of a larger picture of the messiness of the world. Principles cannot, on their own, be relied upon because of *the way the world is*. As a rudimentary consideration, it is not even true to say that there is always a right or wrong answer to questions about the ethics of particular kinds of dissent. Some ethical questions do not have determinate answers. Acceptance of indeterminacy is liable to be an important aspect of any approach toward ethics which hopes to do justice to the complexity and contingency of the world, and to the way in which practical wisdom involves an ability to make sense of the particular circumstance rather than the will to follow a set rule (Dancy 2004). There is even, as the fable of the colonial ethicists suggest, something of an authoritarian tendency built into the search for fixed rules of a universal sort. Looking beyond the analytic tradition of ethics, this is a point which has been highlighted in postmodernist literature by figures such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Emmanuel Levinas. It is sometimes associated with the idea of deconstruction in which the regular rules by which we live and

build theories are subverted (Critchley 2014). Or, at least, it is often inspired by those deconstructionist thinkers whose work has outlasted the postmodernist wave of the late 20th century. I am not, myself, proposing a postmodernist theory and my framing of the idea of indeterminacy draws instead from the analytic tradition. But I can sympathize with someone like Zygmunt Bauman when he frames a broadly similar point in the different terms of another tradition:

> I suggest that the novelty of the postmodern approach to ethics consists first and foremost not in the abandoning of characteristically modern moral concerns, but in the rejection of the typically modern ways of going about its moral problems (that is, responding to moral challenges with coercive normative regulation in political practice, and the philosophical search for absolutes, universals and foundations in theory).
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> (Bauman 1993: 3–4)

Bauman's point is very close to the idea that the fable of the colonial ethicists is geared to draw out. Whether or not his negative characterization of postmodern ethics is correct, I take it to be a good characterization of the kind of ethics that has become most relevant: one which is anti-foundationalist, critical of the search for universal ethical rules and flexible enough to allow us to change tack when an ethic threatens to drive us toward counterintuitive standpoints, authoritarian solutions, and undue support for coercive measures simply because they happen to align with some or other longstanding ethico-political rule or practice.

Indeterminacy is not, of course, unique to ethics. Analogies may be drawn with special problems in mathematics, but indeterminacy is more widespread in ethics than it could ever be in mathematics, and this marks an important difference between these different kinds of discourse. There are things that we can and cannot get them to do. For clarity, I take it that many ethical questions really do have determinate answers. That the domain of ethics is "truth-apt." Above, I mention ethical side-constraints accepted across different times and different cultures. They provide clear-cut answers to questions that are rarely asked because the answers are so obvious. So, for example, if I were to ask, "Is it wrong to wantonly kill infants?" The answer is, clearly and trivially, "Yes. Wantonly killing infants is wrong." And if we were to think otherwise, even as an intellectual exercise, then we would most likely be confused about the standing of ethics or about the nature of truth. Of course, we can still argue about killing, wantonness, and infancy, but some commitment in this area is to be expected, even in the face of drift between our different ways of using concepts. Similarly, I will take it that the following more directly political questions also have determinate answers: "Would it be wrong for a politician to habitually lie?" and "Is it wrong to appeal

to racist immigration controls in order to promote a political cause?" One correct way to answer both would be to say "Yes." There is a truth of these matters, and the truth is so obvious, so much a mere platitude that we rarely if ever ask such questions seriously, outside of a seminar room or an online forum where discussion has drifted toward the wilder shores of metaethics and deliberation about the nature of truth itself.

For clarity, the indeterminacy that I am upholding concerns the lack of straightforward answers in many cases. It is not about the indeterminacy of *meaning* or the sheer elusiveness of words. The answers to ethical questions in political contexts are sometimes indeterminate, even though the questions themselves may be well understood. But there are also interesting cases where no simple answer can be given. The reasons for this vary. It may well be the case that some political questions have no determinate answer because nothing important turns upon them. Questions such as "Should our banners be yellow or purple?" are grammatically well formed and meaningful, but they are also so trivial that they are beyond any single correct response. However, some nontrivial questions also look like they should have clear-cut answers, but no simple answer can capture the truth. "Should the Lakota celebrate Thanksgiving?" is a case in point. It is tempting to say that this *must* surely have an answer of a straightforward sort, precisely because it touches upon matters of deep importance. It touches upon community celebration, the bringing together of a people, terrible legacies of the past, and the danger of eliding over great wrongs that have been done. But there is no single correct response of a sort that would work like a yes or no answer. There are different and reasonable ways to participate and to reject participation in Thanksgiving celebrations. None outweigh the others. At some time in the future, there may be only one plausible response, but at the moment there are many.

This time indexing also suggests a difference between indeterminacy and appeals to a distinction between *matters of principle* (which are determinate) and questions of *strategy and tactics* (which are flexible). On this more familiar left approach, principles mark ethical commitments in politics, but strategy and tactics do not. There may be better options or worse options; however, the differences between them do not run deep. Having said this, the distinction between closed principles and open-ended strategy and tactics is not absolute, even on the traditional far left. One of the main texts of the 20th-century Trotskyism, *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party* written in 1943 by James P. Cannon, claimed that disagreements about tactics conceal disagreements about fundamental political principle. The internal disputes of small groupings were de facto shaped by the course of the class struggle. A rather large assumption to make, and one which gave a rationale for cascading organizational splits over apparently secondary matters in the belief that something important must always be at stake. "Political struggles in general, including serious factional struggles in a party, do not take

place in a vacuum. They are carried on under the pressure of social forces and reflect the class struggle to one degree or another" (Cannon 1972: 1). Anything of this sort will be very far from what I have in mind when appealing to the lack of determinacy that certain ethical questions have. Talk of principles and about strategy and tactics may still have their place, but its place is not large and it is usually found within means-ends deliberation, in which there is both stability and often a truth of the matter: some courses of action really are more effective than others. But here, I want to direct attention to other areas of politics and ethics, places where there is far more indeterminacy and much more change over the course of time and from place to place. My guiding thought is that the world where principles on the one hand and strategy and tactics on the other might yield adequate guidance is a much more fixed place than the world in which we actually live.

As a further clarification, in the Thanksgiving example, there is an implicit concern for particularity. Matters are narrowed down to the Lakota rather than to all Indigenous Americans, in order to avoid eliding over distinctive identities and specific histories which carry special ethical weighting. The current celebration of Thanksgiving as a national holiday in the US is partly due to a decision taken by Abraham Lincoln to commemorate the Union victory at the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863. But the Lakota have a troubled history not just with the US, but specifically with Lincoln. A history which involves hangings. Finally, the focus upon Lakota is also a matter of some convenience, given their prominence among the Indigenous nations at the forefront of political dissent over the past 60 years, including a series of protests at Standing Rock, South Dakota, from 2016 onwards about the laying of an oil pipeline in violation of Indigenous nation sovereignty. The example is also chosen because it is nontrivial. It touches upon matters of *belonging* and fears about the betrayal of heritage. If there is no simple yes or no answer to the question of celebration, it is not because any of these things are unimportant. It is also *not* because it is a difficult question and at a certain point we simply give up on finding an answer. Difficult questions or hard cases in ethics may often have difficult answers; difficult because they are not easy to tease out and difficult because they will not please everyone.

As a case in point, where a hard case has a difficult but determinate answer, we might think of people burning themselves to death as a political protest, that is, self-immolation. This is an increasingly familiar event within liberal democracies (Milligan 2020). The number of cases is still not large, but it happens year in and year out. Those who engage in such actions typically enjoy a good deal of retrospective support among political peers and associates. The causes for which they set themselves on fire and burn to death or close to death are often good causes. Nonetheless, it is probably *wrong* to engage in this kind of protest within liberal democracies on the grounds that it pushes cruelty into a political

domain and because the rejection of cruelty is worth upholding even in cases where the cruelty in question is directed toward the self. Such actions serve to undermine something that we should not seek to undermine. In both these hard cases, the celebration of Thanksgiving by Lakota and self-immolation within liberal democracies, we can easily imagine circumstances in which indeterminacy is replaced by determinacy and vice versa. Questions such as "Is this right or permissible?" have a determinate answer in one hard case, but not in the other. Yet we can imagine that this might switch.

IV A modest particularism

A readiness to accept indeterminacy of the above sort says something about our general understanding of ethics and about our readiness to come to terms with the world as it is rather than the simpler place that we would sometimes like it to be. And this matters for a multiplicity of reasons, one of which is that a pattern of protest may have become so entrenched that it seems *necessary*. It seems as if we simply *must* continue with it. That it would be wrong to end it and start to do something else. Support for boycotts rather than constructive engagement in response to injustice can often be like this. Boycotts of Israeli goods, sports teams, and even academic journals are a case in point. These form the longest-running series of boycotts within and concerning any state, reaching back to the boycotting of Jewish stores in Mandatory Palestine following the First World War; a more organized series of boycotts by the Arab Labor Federation in 1933–1934; renewed attempts at boycott during the anti-Jewish riots of 1936; together with the succession of boycotts organized upon the actual founding of Israel in 1948 (Feiler 1998: 21–63). While the rationales have shifted, the practice has remained the same for a century.

As a very broad rule of thumb, once a long string of boycotts has reached its 100th year without achieving any worthwhile outcome, it is probably time to reflect upon whether there is any great sense in continuing. It may seem from a certain point of view that there must be some deep principle requiring us to support a boycott in this or other cases. It may seem that James Cannon's thought applies, and that behind petty disagreements some great issue is guiding our preferred ways of acting, but often there is not. Often, there is simply a kind of political inertia. An evasion of the obvious. In the case of Israel, it is absurd to imagine that boycotts will help to bring about an end of the state's existence rather than leading to economic diversification to work around the problem. Yet this is not a pathway to setting up some principle *against* boycotts. Boycotts can be effective, as in the case of the focused boycott of Apartheid in South Africa. Cohesive economic boycott lasted around 15 years, at the tail end of an Apartheid system which was clearly faltering under the sheer

pressure of South African demographics with a dominant white population of only around 13% in the final years (Chimere-dan 1992). But often, boycotts are more expressive than effective. They proceed through a reshaping of market transactions and tend to be only in the vaguest sense *goal directed* rather than an expression of dislike, or hostility, or rejection of what is other. Their continuation in the face of ineffectiveness can also reflect a kind of political inertia or a fear of breaking ranks in a way which is analogous to the crossing of a picket line. This image of breaking ranks ripples through multiple forms of activism shaped by late social democracy. At times, unity and the non-breaking of ranks can assume a spurious value all of its own, even though unity can make bad courses of action worse than they would otherwise be. And even though a breaking of ranks may occur in pursuit of some better possibility. Put simply, when we do not want to change our practice or when we are afraid to do so, it is all too easy to lapse into something close to Cannon's idea that a matter of fundamental or foundational importance is hidden in the detail. Something that requires us to continue as others have done and in much the same way. This is, of course, a profoundly conservative way of thinking. One in which habit takes the place of thoughtfulness and the ability to say obvious but disturbing things.

Such conservatism about political practices is shaped in part by a failure to come to terms with political contingencies and a tendency to mistake them for necessities, for ways of acting *which could not be otherwise*. Thinking about ethics can be like this too. When we happen to be trained in a tradition, it may seem that its ways of proceeding are the only option. Yet even an overview of ethics brings us up against multiple contingencies. There are habits, norms, and regularities, but there is no natural way to divide up approaches toward ethics. They are not what we might call "natural kinds," set into the physical order of things, nor are key ethical concepts the names for such natural kinds (Kripke 1981: 127–128). The sheer nature of things does not fix ethics or the concepts that it calls upon. Once we have accepted that ethics has a place within political discourse, we still have all sorts of questions about the kind of ethics that we should bring to bear. Arguments may be had about which approach does the best work in which context or *overall*. We may appeal to the ethics of the continental tradition or of the analytic tradition; Eastern Ethics and ideas of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*; or Western Ethics and ideas of political compassion and the upholding of rights. We may focus upon deontology and duty, or virtues and character, or consequences and the maximization of the good, although what has already been said and pictured in the fable of the colonial ethicists suggests that any attempt to compress matters down to a single set of basic concepts will be flawed. As indicated above, this text shows a preference for a broadly analytic style in the tradition of Western Ethics. Not as a superior tradition, but simply as the tradition that I happen to be trained in, however

much I may also depart from it and however attractive other options may happen to be. When questions such as these, of stylistic preference and feeling at home in a way of doing things, are raised, we are already in the middle of discussion about ethics, already posing problems in one way rather than another. Just as our colonial ethicists in the fable were already in the middle of things when they set about devising a structure for ethics. But if problems are to be posed at all, they can hardly be posed without setting matters out in one way or another. Yet it is important to remember that a preference for doing things in one way rather than another is not forced upon us by reason, logic, or by the nature of things.

Beyond the simple matter of writing in a broadly analytic style, the approach here is geared toward ambiguities, gaps, and the grey areas of human experience. The points at which things break down and where no compact set of considerations will do all of the required work. One way of embracing an ethics of this sort involves what is known as "normative pluralism." An acknowledgement that there are multiple sources of normativity, that is, multiple sources of our reasons for action. Such pluralism is not about one group of people valuing one thing while another group values something else. It is about acknowledgment that all of us value many things and that it is sometimes impossible to secure them all simultaneously. The universe is not set up for our convenience, and it is difficult to even imagine any nonauthoritarian world in which we might only want things that happen to be compatible with one another. The multiplicity of the things that we value is also part of the reason why a politically driven search for fundamental values (to replace an overreliance upon appeals to principles) is only ever likely to be a way of attenuating some small subset of the things that humans like ourselves really care about, and then imagining that we are the only ones who *really* care while our opponents do not.

Above all things, this text is an exercise in a normative pluralism which rejects any such reduction. Particularism is one of many names for varieties of normative pluralism which reject such reducing and foundationalist approaches. It is particularly noted for a rejection of any reduction of ethics to principles or to some core set of basic values that principles might rest upon. Particularism can be given its own philosophical back story, its own special "case for." One of the better-known moves in this back story involves appeal to what are known as "hospital cases" (Stocker 1976). These loosen the hold of consequentialist and Kantian appeals to principles as the heart of ethics. Imagine that you visit a friend in hospital. Suddenly, they ask "What are you doing here?" And you reply by appeal to your preferred theory. If you are a consequentialist, you might say "I am here to maximize human well-being, and to help secure the greatest good for the greatest number." If you are a deontologist, you might say "It is a moral imperative for me to visit friends in hospital, if I can do so," or "My visit to you satisfies a duty

of benevolence. I could satisfy it in various different ways, but this one is convenient." Or if you are a virtue ethicist running with an analytic reworking of ideas from Plato and Aristotle or Hume and Nietzsche, you might even say "Visiting you is what any virtuous agent would do under similar circumstances, all other things being equal." More tenuously, but drawing from a special understanding of what virtue looks like, you might say, "When I heard that you were ill, I asked myself 'What would Jesus do?' and came up with this." There is something odd in each case. A lack of any real sense of connection either to the person in hospital or to the things that typically motivate humans to act. The reasons offered may even sound a little like they belong in a comedy where a central character does not quite get other agents. Someone who cannot occupy the point of view held by anyone else. However, we might think that the oddity of the response rests with the formulation and not with the actual reasons offered. That a general "stiffness" of the replies is the problem and not at all the reasons for visiting that they attempt to articulate. Alternatively, we may think that their oddity can be found in the way that they drive apart *motivation* and *justification*: what leads us to act (the personal care) and what justifies actions (a moral theory). Suppose, instead of appealing to a theory, you simply say that "I am here because I care" or "Where else would I be?" That would tell us much more about what is really going on and serve as both an explanation of motivation and of justification. We can imagine a request for further justification in special cases, "But why do you care?" when someone is fishing for a declaration of love. But such a further move is not always necessary. Nor is the thought that the statement of care needs to be translated into the language of a special theory.

As a qualification to all this, hospital cases are conspicuously personal in a way that many questions of political ethics are not. It seems like a bad idea to collapse the two rather than acknowledging distance and contrasts. Yet, the idea that an overly rigid ethical theory might lead us to justify political actions in ways that depart from our actual motivations in carrying them out, carries over reasonably well from one context to the other, from the personal to the political. As a further qualification, one of the dangers of making argumentative moves of this sort is that it may lapse into overreliance upon a theory which is just as limited as all the others, but unacknowledged. It would be just as awkward to say that "I came here because I am a particularist, and after assessing the specific circumstances I decided that a hospital visit would be appropriate." The lure of an inhuman, uncaring ethics is present everywhere, once we start to theorize right and wrong and once we imagine that the answer to questions of this sort must involve appeal to something like a principle or a core ethical value. An approach which points out the limitations of principles and stresses the importance of time and circumstance may fall foul of its own arguments and begin to look like the very thing that it

aspires to replace. And so, it makes sense to be cautious about endorsing "particularism" as a general theory about ethics rather than a way of thinking about ethics that happens to be especially salient to where we are now and to political dissent as it occurs now. With this qualification in place, it may be useful to think of what follows as a "modest particularism," about the ethics of dissent. It will be modest in three respects: principles will be downgraded rather than eliminated; the approach will not aspire to set up a special ethical theory, a rival to other established theories; and finally, any overall and principles-based sense of moral superiority to political opponents will be rejected.

My concern will not then be with particularism as a general ethical theory, rivaling utilitarianism, deontology, or virtue ethics, but rather with drawing attention to a number of ethically salient considerations, such as the importance of political compassion in our dealings with others, including opponents toward whom we are often expected to have a more fixed and hostile attitude. Compassion of this sort may be blocked by the ossification of patterns of dissent alluded to above, in cases where a practice such as boycott gets nowhere but continues. It may also be blocked by an unrealistic assessment of our own side as full of agents of good moral character, while agents on other sides are of bad moral character. Heroes and villains, friends and enemies, such assessments are usually wrong. They run the risk of overestimating differences of ethical standing between ordinary political agents such as ourselves. More formally, and with some qualifications for political outlooks which border upon brutality and the barbaric, moral character does not reliably track political alignment. Nor does political alignment reliably track character, although there are some special cases in which it may do so. Along with Gandhi, I suspect that most of us are at around the same moral level. Even if some of us happen to be correct about a particular set of political claims, while others are wrong about them, it is not the case that the former are good people and the latter are bad people or that the former are better people while the latter are worse. One of the more damaging results of an overreliance upon appeals to political principles, or to core or fundamental values, is that such mythologies about ethical standing are passed on from one generation of political agents to the next.

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2 The Very Idea of Dissent

Insisting upon the need for a rich conceptual repertoire if we are to navigate our way through the ethical problems raised by protest and dissent is one thing. Delivering even a small part of what is required is more of a challenge. In what follows, a beginning will be made by trying to tease out the very idea of dissent and the breadth of actions that might qualify. The concept stretches beyond protest in anything like its familiar 20th-century forms of strikes, demonstrations, and set piece protests. But even if we recognize this, there is still a risk that the account will lapse back into the norms and ways of understanding dissent which are characteristic of the tradition of social democracy or at least shaped by the latter. And this is something that I am trying to avoid, given the visible ebb of that particular tradition and its entanglement with colonial-era assumptions, the assumptions prevalent during a heyday which is now decades in the past. But again, saying this is one thing and actually moving away from social democratic ways of thinking is another.

To tackle the problem, I will make two strategic moves, two moves which will be embedded in what follows. The first move involves supplying a counterpart or foil to dissent within liberal democracies of the West. Something from the outside, yet not too far outside. For this, I consider the dissident and the dissident tradition of Eastern Europe. And while the idea of the dissident and dissent are related to one another, dissidents have faced risks and depths of engagement which are beyond anything that most of us inside liberal democracies will ever be called upon to live out. The second move involves focusing upon kinds of dissent which are a good distance removed from the social democratic tradition and removed from its own paradigm form of dissent, that is, trade union activism.

I An ambiguous concept

On 14 April 2018, environmental activist and LGBT rights lawyer David Buckel set himself on fire in Prospect Park, New York. Nearby, he left a note: "I am David Buckel and I just killed myself by fire as a protest suicide…I apologize to you for the mess" (Levinson and Milian 2018).

DOI: 10.4324/9780429022524-3

His self-immolation and apology combined civility with action beyond the bounds of civility. It was an instance of dissent. It was also an individual act, like most of the self-immolations which have occurred in the US and Europe and unlike comparable actions in Tibet and Telangana. In these places, when people set themselves on fire in order to make a point, the action tends to have stronger collective dimensions, leading to disputes about the label of political suicide. Self-immolations in the US and Europe also tend to occur in waves. Small waves, but there is usually a succession of incidents (Milligan 2020), although they also take place without the collective support of any political movement which specializes in such actions. Another difference from Telangana and Tibet. Self-immolations of this sort are also politically open, in the sense that they are not exclusive to any given standpoint on a left-right spectrum. They can be carried out for the worst of causes as well as for the best of cause. On 26 April 1995, Reinhold Elstner self-immolated at the Feldherrnhalle in Munich in protest over an exhibition of Wehrmacht war crimes. Claiming "50 years of judicial Zionist revenge are sufficient" and denouncing accounts of the Holocaust as "fairy tales" (Elstner 1995). The death note observes the customary moves of beginning with attacks upon Zionists and Israel, and claiming sympathy with Jewish acquaintances, before slipping directly into attacks on "the Jews" and moving on to Holocaust denial. Online sites hosting the letter are typically less reserved. This self-immolation sparked several years of commemorations and counterdemonstrations. In part, because of the location. The Feldherrnhalle is a site closely linked to the rise of the Nazi Party, to the Bierkeller Putsch of 1923, and to its annual reenactment during the Nazi era. It is also one of the few places in the world where you can (by accident, in my own case) stand exactly where Hitler stood.

Self-immolations, whatever their political complexion, are acts of dissent, every bit as much as marches or the occupation of public parks in New York. In our regular, ambiguous use of the terms, they are protests as well as instances of dissent. These two concepts overlap. They are sometimes interchangeable (and will sometimes be used interchangeably in this book), but they do not always operate in exactly the same ways. "Dissent" tends to be used more broadly than "protest," with the latter typically used in the case of demonstrations, marches, and public rallies rather than individual acts. Even so, the distinction between the two is not marked by any rigid dichotomy or by a strict division between individual and collective action. Dissent covers both. Self-immolation and its disturbing but steady reemergence in liberal democracies is a stark and unsettling aspect of our changing patterns of dissent. A reminder that time should be factored in when we think about political action of almost any sort. In the late 20th century, such actions remained an oddity. Now, we expect them to happen once or twice a year. Patterns of dissent change. Time makes a difference. And this can be a matter of

some interest. Political agents who engage in protest sometimes think of solidarity, but less often about protest and time, yet the latter line of thought is surely deeper. It is a line of thought that may lead us to think of particular events having the significance that they do, in part because they occur at a particular place and at a particular point in time. The incident near Feldherrenhalle was sinister rather than a sad oddity, because of where it took place and when.

The concept of dissent seems like a natural option when we speak of events and patterns of action shape-shifting and developing over time. But referring to Buckel's act as both protest and dissent seems unforced, something that fits at least as well as any other option. However, we regard many other things as political dissent, from marches and gatherings, through to the attempt to speak the truth to power or to pass on certain truths to a wider audience through whistle-blowing (O'Leary 2020). In our familiar understanding of the concept of dissent, the Stonewall Riots of June 1969, complete with pitched confrontation between police and crowds from the gay bars of Greenwich Village, involved dissent. Yet, dissent need not involve either violence or drama. The seminal address of Karl Heirich Ulrichs to the Congress of German Jurists calling for a repeal of the laws against homosexuality was also an instance of dissent, on a plausible understanding of the latter. Streets in Munich, Bremen, Hanover, and Berlin are now named after him. Yet, when he crossed the Odeonsplatz and passed the Feldherrenhalle on the morning of 29 August 1867 to deliver the address, it is difficult to imagine his state of mind. Later, he tried to capture a sense of the moment: "There is still time to keep silent. Simply waive your request to speak, and then you heart can stop pounding" (Beachy 2015: 4). Ulrichs selling point was an appeal not just to the innocence of those punished unjustly, but to "a question of damming a continuing flood of suicides" (Beachy 2015: 5). A clever point with the potential for a direct connection to some in the audience. Some may have known men who had killed themselves. Some may have contemplated doing so themselves. The respectful delivery went as expected, with interruptions and shouts of outrage. What is perhaps surprising is that some in the audience urged him to continue and not to yield the floor. The speech was never finished. Eventually, the interruptions were too many, too loud, and utterly hostile.

Ulrichs did not march into the assembly or get dragged out of it. But his action counted, and it counted as dissent in the form of a courageous public stand against the prevailing norms of the day. Stonewall, Ulrichs address, and Buckel's self-immolation all involved courage and a challenge to norms. They all involved agents who rejected sexual standards and oppressive gender constructs which were widely shared across the political spectrum. And still are. Our shared prejudices run deep. Dissent by Ulrich involved speech acts and only speech acts, although the need for physical defense was a definite possibility. Yet, the words

themselves, without context, would not count as dissent. Someone might stand up 50 years from now and repeat his words as a commonplace. Today, the repetition would still be dissent, but after a further half century has elapsed, they might simply be a nod to history and to courage of an unusual sort. Unless hopelessly naïve, he must have known that his appeal would fall upon deaf ears, before a disapproving audience. Yet, he would also know that he was not the only man in the room who regularly violated the norms of the times. What counts as dissent, again, depends upon time and place. It does not depend upon the internal features of the act alone. Context matters.

So too does the sequence of events and the emergence of concepts over the course of time. The concept of dissent has its own history. Edmund Spencer's *The Faerie Queen* from 1590 is one of the customary points to which we look when tracking its evolution. A moment of historic breakthrough when political upheaval and routine disagreement were linked together: "And all dissention, which doth dayly grow Among fragile men, that many a publike state And many a priuate of doth ouerthrow" (Spencer 2013: Book IV, Canto). When the concept is understood in such an inclusive manner, dissent can take place in undramatic ways, in our daily interactions with one another as well as on the streets, on the stage, online, or in otherwise respectable gatherings. Violence may be involved, as it arguably is with self-immolation, but dissent is often peaceful and involves the setting forth of grounds for complaint. The cases focused upon in this text are largely nonviolent, with occasional exceptions. Or they are cases where there is an ambiguity about the violence or something atypical about it, such as its direction toward self rather than others. Yet, this alone may not stop it from being violence, unless we think of violence as a challenge to the autonomy of others. There are multiple reasons for focusing attention away from violence or at least from its more typical instances. Reasons which need not involve a failure to recognize that violence plays multiple political roles. A focus upon the less violent cases of dissent need not entail the difficult claim that we should never engage in violence for political ends. Any one of us can probably imagine fictionally extreme circumstances under which political violence might be the only defensible option, the only way of responding to an intolerable set of conditions, or the only way of preventing some great act of inhumanity. There are many existing studies of the ethics of terrorism, riot, the escalation of direct political action into bodily harm, and the destruction of property. There are some studies of compassion in politics (Porter 2006; Nussbaum 2015; Hawkins and Nadel 2021), but fewer in which compassion and care for political opponents figure prominently. Violence may distract from these matters as something that fascinates in many disturbing ways. A fascination with violence may also lead us to miss the simple point that nonviolent dissent accounts for the overwhelming majority of all dissent once we operate with a broadened

understanding of the latter, an understanding which reaches beyond the idea of protest. The comparable levels of violent and nonviolent dissent are not even close. We complain long before we begin to lay hands upon one another, before we topple statues or burn down buildings. Many of us will have engaged in some action which might plausibly be classified as political dissent, but few of us have charged police lines or attempted to overturn cars in the street. The drama and excitement of violence can lead us to mistake a more exceptional set of circumstances for our less dramatic and routine norm.

Here, I have allowed that the concept of dissent has a certain breadth that we would not necessarily want to preserve in the case of "direct action," or "civil disobedience," or any number of other concepts of protest which have a more dedicated set of roles to play. Instead, the approach allows dissent to span the distance between rioting against harassment in Manhattan and an untimely speech before an audience of homophobic 19th-century jurists. With such a large span, it is not easy to track its outside edges or to say exactly what sets dissent apart from other forms of political activity. There is also a danger of treating the concept as something fixed and given rather than a concept that evolves. The sheer idea of "dissent" does not, after all, pick out a natural kind, a species of thing whose boundaries are set by nature itself, independently of our norms, values, and preferred ways of speaking. It is, instead, part of a conceptual repertoire which is in many respects contingent. Spenser did not need to talk about "dissention" among fragile men. He did not need to echo Italian and Latin literature and did not need to pick out the ongoing popular agon that periodically boils over into something more threatening. Nor did others have to follow his lead. Nor did the conceptual repertoire of early modern English political life have to exert such a hold over later generations. These things came to pass when other things might have done so, giving us a different history and (in some respects) another world. When trying to make sense of ethics, or politics, or both, it is easy to lose sight of this fact and to imagine instead that "protest and dissent," "left and right," "liberal and conservative," even "virtue and vice" are somehow *always there*, structured into the very order of things, awaiting the emergence of a discourse to chisel them out. There are few if any concepts which are like this, few or none which simply follow the contours set by the universe itself. For most, their meaning can drift and shift over time. Yet, in the absence of some special reason for a radical change of meaning, the unavoidability of such drift does not license us to use concepts in whatever way we happen to like, while covertly trading upon a more familiar range of meanings. A grasp of the ways in which concepts work gives us something tangible to deal with, and ways to avoid disputes in which the meaning of terms is driven by little more than partisan alignment rather than a desire to engage in dialogue or to contribute to a discourse with opponents and rivals as well as allies.

Below (in the second section of this chapter), I will consider and reject one option for extending the concept of "dissent" by bringing it closer to the idea of the political dissident. At least, the option will be rejected *up to a point*. I believe that the concept of the dissident can shed light upon the ways in which we think about dissent within liberal democracies, but most of those who engage in dissent are not dissidents.

Minimally, I want to affirm that there is enough cohesion to the concept for us to recognize obvious candidate cases of dissent when we see them. But this is different from identifying a single defining core that runs through everything that we are inclined to call dissent. It is different from providing an essentialist definition. However, the absence of any such defining core is not the absence of any continuity across cases. After all, dissent is *always* relational. Without something challenged or rejected, there can be no dissent. Yet, this is very far from reducing politics itself to a relation of opposition or, in the manner of Carl Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political* (1932), treating the idea of friend and enemy as politically basic, or even a precondition of the political. This persuasive idea has become something of an unworthy successor to Marx's view that the history of politics is the history of class struggle. It has found champions on the left as well as the right as a way to keep our understanding of politics reduced to something binary, where the ultimate question is "Which side are you on?" Yet, dissent does not presuppose such a polarized world, and opposition which qualifies as dissent need not always involve a clear sense of what is opposed or what might take its place. Often, there is an element of ambiguity about these matters, an ambiguity which is not removed by shifting from dissent in the form of discussions to dissent in the form of direct action, protest, and demonstration. The clarity of deeds does not automatically resolve a lack of precision in the targeting of a good deal of our unease with how the world is structured. And this lack of precision is a source of risk. A temptation to resolve such uncomfortable ambiguities by slotting in some well-known placeholder of those responsible for what has fallen short or gone wrong: bankers, the government, the elite, international bankers, moneylenders, or (all too often) some particular group of Jews.

Whether we like it or not, some level of ambiguity in the target of dissent is the norm, even when a shift is made to protest. As an illustration of the point, we might think about three prominent 21st-century protests. In 2002, the Countryside Alliance in England and Wales managed to stage the largest demonstration in British political history, assembling at least 400,000 people in London, with mobilization around a large range of issues beyond the organizers' priority of defending fox hunting. Narratives among demonstrators varied, yet the demonstration was too large simply to dismiss this as bait and switch, with mobilization and the organizers' claimed cause entirely separate (Milligan 2013). Those taking part were willing to do so in the knowledge of a clear connection

to fox hunting, but they were not necessarily taking part *because* they believed fervently in the continuation of fox hunting. It is also noteworthy that the cause did not fit with a perception of protest as primarily something *of the left*. Dissent comes from multiple directions. Yet, the perception of protest as a left thing is there. When the assault upon the US Capitol building in 2021 went badly wrong for Donald Trump, supporters began to suggest that these were not even his people and that they looked like Democrats or possibly Antifa. The latter is a broad and informal network of mostly anarchist groups with some roots in the anti-capitalist movement of the turn of the century, often quite new and united by a readiness to take up the longstanding anarchist "anti-fascist action" identity. The groups tend to be fairly traditional in their political outlook, emphasizing class and the struggle against fascism, but it is one of the few remaining far-left networks to have not only survived but flourished following the demise of the Trotskyist groupings. They are frequently targeted by Donald Trump as evidence of a highly coordinated far-left threat. There is no credible evidence of influence on the scale imagined. However, repeated targeting may have solidified what were previously a very informal set of ties, such that it was an open question as to whether Antifa was really a single "group" at all until the time of a Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville in 2017 (LaFree 2018). Mobilization against the rally and retrospective controversy over it seems to have been an important consolidation point, and helped to shape the emergence of a broadly shared anti-Trump narrative. Not just through traditional 20th-century countermobilization, but through social media exchanges afterwards (Klein 2019). By the time of the 2020 Election, it clearly did have a stable presence, but it was still odd to suggest that undercover Antifa supporters rather than Trump supporters wearing his "Make America Great Again" hats, waving his banners, and coming from a rally addressed by Donald Trump were responsible for the assault upon the Capitol. Both the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the fact-checking team at Reuters (2021) worked the problem and found no credible evidence of a connection between identified individuals and Antifa. The crowd was just what it looked like. Supporters of Donald Trump who refused to acknowledge his defeat. Yet, the claim that they were undercover Antifa operatives played upon a familiarity with protests and even violence at demonstrations as *something that the left does*. The perception has always involved an oversimplification, but it remains forceful, allowing for left-right crossovers. The Countryside Alliance, for example, drew upon some level of participation from political agents who would go on to diligently vote for England's main social democratic party at the next election as well as a larger body of people drawn more to the right.

And when we look at causes associated with the left, strong elements of ambiguity in the targeting and objectives do not disappear. In 2011,

Zuccotti Park in New York was taken over by an Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement whose most prominent voices were critical of capitalism, supportive of direct democracy, and favorable to a popular economic accountability which is not characteristic of most modern political systems (Graeber 2013: 49–53). As a further case of left-leaning dissent, we might think of the ecology protests in London in 2018, when five major public sites were taken over by Extinction Rebellion (XR) groups, whose aims included the declaration of a climate emergency, action on biodiversity loss, and assembly based citizen involvement in decision-making (Extinction Rebellion 2021). As at Zuccotti Park, direct democracy figured as part of a political response to apparently failing aspects of our democratic systems, which are no longer as young as they once were. New political forces in recent times do seem to have been drawn to this idea of new reconstructions of public space. Manuel Castells's appraisal of the movements of 2011 in *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (2015) marks something of a transition between the two, emphasizing autonomy and the internet over talk of direct democracy and transitory acts of physical assembly: "only by being autonomous could they overcome multiple forms of ideological and political control and find, individually and collectively, new ways of life" (Castells 2015: 171). In some ways, the account fits XR better than the Occupy movement or the parallel movement of the *Indignadas* in Spain. (A movement Castells was directly involved with.) Again, there was an attempt to draw upon decentralized organization, management theories of "holacracy" in the case of XR (Bernstein, Bunch, Canner, Lee), nonviolent civil disobedience, and a shift toward talk about "values" alongside more traditional social democratic appeals to political principles or "fundamental political principles." Yet, if the appraisal in the first chapter is correct, the shift remains bounded by assumptions about ethics that retains much the same structure. Nonetheless, there is a straining against the idea of principles, and even a move onto ground often identified as more comfortable for the political right. Value talk has often tended to feature within politics in the form of appeals to family values and a sense of values which might be related to the possession of a moral compass. A problematic metaphor given that compasses point in only one direction, no matter where agents stand or how they are situated.

The protests at Zuccotti Park and at the briefer XR events had a clear shape to them, with notable differences from paradigm instances of the more socialist-identifying protests of the 20th century. But beyond some general ideas about direct democracy, what the different and better world of the protestors might look like remained unclear. This lack of any detailed alternative to the current states of affairs might seem like an affront to the political sensibilities of traditional 20th-century program builders and designs for life. Alternatively, it may be read as a measure of authenticity. Although we may not want to push this concept too far

or to slip into what Theodore Adorno of the mid-20th-century New Left referred to as a "jargon of authenticity," in which an elusive pursuit of the original and true order of things makes us feel lost amid the more flawed jumble of existence (Adorno 2002). Nonetheless, ambiguities within protests can reinforce a claim to represent wider trends among people who may never take to the streets, never wave a banner, or argue about a political program. Given the existence of habitual protestors and a perennial sequence of small groupings which aim to strategically embed themselves within much larger movements, there can be serious mismatches between public shows of apparent strength and real presence. Here I am alluding to practices advocated by Trotsky (1933) in one of his most influential articles "The Lever of a Small Group" to allow small organizations to shape events before they grow into large organizations. By picking the right forum, not too large, not too small, and open to being won over, even a very modestly sized but disciplined organization can have a noticeable public impact. This is rarely an issue now, setting aside mythologies about Antifa, because most of the traditional far left has gone. Maoists dying out in the 1970s, the Communist Parties wilting in the 1980s, and the more sizeable of the Trotskyist groupings splitting up in the 1990s and 2000s.

Nonetheless, this has left a significant number of free-floating political agents, with some identification as Marxist, anarchist, or notionally revolutionary socialist. Preprepared programs with a clearly anti-capitalist slant sometimes can be suspect. They may lead us to wonder just what a protest actually represents as a social phenomenon as opposed to what its organizers call for. A protest may happen because there are organizations and activists habitually arranging them and people who habitually attend, shifting from one event to another. In Plymouth, Massachusetts, at a site overlooking the harbor and a replica of the Mayflower, there is an annual protest event about Thanksgiving, which is now in its fifth decade (UAINE 2021). Organized by the United American Indians of New England (UAINE) and "native led," it does much the same thing year in year out, and with a steady drift toward the look and feel of a 20th-century demonstration of the left. This does not happen because the cause in question demands it. The same cause generates different responses elsewhere, with larger and more varying protests over in the Dakotas and San Francisco under the remit of the International Indian Treaty Council and with a Sunrise Ceremony on Alcatraz as a focal point. The International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) is comfortable with the labeling of the event as "Indigenous People's Thanksgiving" (IITC 2021), although the event is generally reported as "Unthanksgiving Day." There is a greater flexibility of approach associated with the West Coast event compared to the Plymouth protest. A recognition that protests can occur and can take the form that they do as the result of inertia, because this is what was previously done. Or because they have become dependent upon

local left groupings who are uncomfortable with change. By contrast, protests without clear agendas or programmatic lists of goals can represent something new. Yet, we are rarely in doubt about the message that those involved are trying to convey or the range of concerns that motivate them to act.

The XR and the OWS protests seem to have involved much more than a parade of the usual well-meaning suspects doing the usual things. Of the two, the former had more initial coordination across multiple locations, but nobody from the main electoral parties of the left was shaping events or giving coherence to the stated aims. Nor was there any evidence of control from an older generation of smaller left-wing groups, such as the much-diminished Communist Parties or party-building Trotskyist groups, even though both may have had a presence. Perhaps more so at Zuccotti Park than in the XR happenings. Instead, there was a strong presence of anarchists and eco-anarchists, and the influence of preexisting networks of eco-dissent and anti-capitalist dissent. In the case of XR, it is striking that the events seem to have run entirely in parallel with and independently from a large wave of organized support for a left-identifying leader of England's Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn. There was a disconnect between the two, a disconnect which contrasts with the way in which 20th-century single-issue campaigns in England (such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) and even the anti-war movements of the early 21st century had drawn upon Labour Party networks and, in turn, fed the latter with new generations of local supporters. Yet, there were forward-looking influences from the past, such as a sense of the force of a powerful but ambiguous image, such as the logo adopted by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND; a simple line and circle combination of semaphore and missile with faint echoes of a painting by Goya). XR was also attentive to its own symbolism and imagery, an encircled hourglass on variously colored backgrounds, to indicate that time is running out. Imagery which is interesting as much for its absences as for its positive content. There were no placards or red banners with clenched fists or branch details; no artists impressions of manly men in cloth caps bodying forth the dignity of labor.

To refer to the XR action and the various actions associated with the Occupy movement as "dissent" as well as protests helps to capture not only a sense of their authenticity, but also a sense of their standing as social phenomena. Their symptomatic nature as indications of an emerging shape of protests and radical politics. They look more like our political future than our political past. And here, the word "radical" seems more appropriate as a description rather than "left" or "left wing." A liberally inspired terminology from the 18th and 19th centuries is less lodged in ideas of a binary opposition against some clearly identifiable enemy. The radical is a concept which seems to be undergoing something of a revival, to fill the conceptual space left by a receding division of the world

into left and right or left, right, and center. Yet, we are where we are, and the latter contrast remains an important way of organizing our thoughts about politics and particularly protest. It is not, for now, something that we can immediately move beyond. Accordingly, I will refer to the "left" at various points in the text and defend its use *for the time being*. But this is not an attempt to treat it as the only and fixed way in which the world of politics must be understood. And although for the time being I identify as being *of the left*, it is far from obvious that the left/right distinction will provide the primary framework for understanding political dissent in future decades. It is, after all, deeply embedded in a tradition of social democracy which is both a colonial era radicalism and visibly eroding as that era slides further into the past. In those Western European countries where the legacies of empire are strongest, in England and Spain, organized social democracy retains an important presence but further decline seems only a matter of time. Whether or not the left/right metaphor will outlive social democracy is unclear. If it survives, it may become less important over time, and settle in as one line of division among others rather than the fundamental way to distinguish between friends and enemies. There are certainly other ways for the required conceptual framing to be carried out. Nonetheless, with qualification, it is a terminology that I will continue to use, with reservations similar to those in the case of "the West," which is far deeper in historical terms, although both have question marks over their future.

In recent times, even protests aligned broadly with the left have tended to be far less centralized than in the past and more embracing of direct democracy; another sign of separateness from traditional social democracy, which always tended toward centralization of party, economy, and protest. The political legacy of this tradition lives on, even as the once large organizations become smaller and, in many cases, divide up what remains and search for substitutes which operate in ways similar to the socialist movements and social democratic electoral machines. One example of such continuing influence is in theories of intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to help make sense of the ways in which different forms of discrimination (initially over gender and race) were interconnected and gave rise to experiences "greater than the sum of racism and sexism" (1989: 140). But the term has been used more broadly and sometimes run in reverse to suggest that wage struggles by white trade unionists are in some implicit way set against racism because forms of oppression intersect, and so a struggle against one is a struggle against all. It could have developed in any number of different ways. But the latter reworking of the concept drifts toward a more social democratic model in which a multiplicity of protests and causes are taken to weave into the form of a single front of the multiply oppressed against a unitary enemy, often identified as neoliberalism rather than capitalism as such and generally with more borrowings from Carl

Schmitt (2007) than from Karl Marx. It seems reasonable to expect a continuing influence of social democracy, in the absence of revival movements of the sort that occurred within the Labour Party in England under Jeremy Corbyn and even in the absence of any conception that social democracy might regain its mass support. A political afterlife, in which there is a repressed awareness that the tradition is not capable of yielding any great social change and that the identity giving imagery of representing a class-conscious proletariat, is increasingly at odds with the reality of a middle-class activist base, underperforming local bureaucracies, and dependent politicians.

The broader left idea that one party can represent everyone or, in more populist formulations, the 99% or all groups who have a legitimate interest to pursue does however seems to have fallen away. It no longer forms the normal backdrop even to those instances of dissent which do carry a clear left identity or alignment. It seems that we are now well past the point at which we might think of dissent as an ancillary practice to the real and serious business of social democratic politics, an unofficial activist sideline of extra-parliamentary activity, connected to the main and more important brand. Yet, in spite of organizational decline and receding political horizons, it remains tempting to think of our diversifying patterns of protest and dissent in terms of a unifying intersectionality, a set of ideas drawn from social democracy and the 19th-century and the 20th-century socialist movements. This point about political afterlife might be understood through a comparison. In the midst of a massive crisis for the tradition of Stalin and the Communist Parties, Jean Paul Sartre passed the ambiguous judgment in his *Search for Method* (1957) that Marxism was nonetheless the *indépassible* philosophy of our time. The Communist Parties would never fully recover from their crisis. The nature of the Soviet regime in Russia had been exposed and was so terrible that Maoists and some of the Trotskyist toyed with the idea that it might be better to think of it as state capitalist and not socialist at all. It was an unfashionable moment for a major public intellectual to praise Marxism.

His comment was a form of alignment. In part, a call for students to be freed to avoid the bad faith of having to keep their views out of the classroom, but also a comment about what were then modern times. Marxism was something that a generation of the left could not actually avoid, even if they wanted to. It was there in the political culture, there in ways of thinking. Something that had to be gone through as a social phenomenon, even if it remained entirely possible that there would be a time after its influence at some point further on. Social democracy is now a little like that. Organizationally, it is a thing from the past, but it continues to cast a long shadow, one that we cannot yet get away from. And the difficulties of trying to do so are all the greater because the contrast of left and right continues to have multiple important roles to play. It would be

easy then to slip into an understanding of protest and dissent shaped by a social democratic mindset. And this is something that I would like to avoid, just as I would like to avoid the unrealistic idea that it is possible, at this moment in time, to write in a way that will be available only after its influence is somewhere further in the past.

II Dissidents and dissent

As indicated at the start of the chapter, as part of a strategy to limit the influence of a more social democratic mindset, I frame the idea of dissent through a contrast with "the dissident" rather than a contrast with the more sedate practices of electoral engagement. This seems to be in keeping with certain aspects of the ways in which dissent has been pictured on the left in recent times. During the heyday of social democracy, it was common to encounter activists who drew a distinction between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary activity and saw their own actions in terms of this distinction. This way of seeing has almost vanished as the prospects of securing any short-term radical change through parliamentary systems has all but gone. Nonetheless, the understanding of protest, activism, and dissent through a contrast is one way to cash out the idea that it is relational and that there is no need for an essentialist definition. Any definition of that sort would have multiple exceptions and qualifications. How the concept is used tells us more about what it means to speak of dissent. And this is much the same as saying that for a large class of cases, its meaning is given by its use. (A formulation that owes something to Wittgenstein.) Or, at least, its *use* is integral to our grasp of the concept in a way that reduction to a definition would not be. The concept of violence is like this too. We may not be able to give a satisfactory definition which fits everything that we are inclined to call violence, but for a large class of cases, we know it when we see it (Bufacchi 2007).

This approach, of looking at how concepts are used, helps us to carve apart various proximate and related concepts in plausible ways. So, for example, the distinction between our familiar ways of using the concepts of protest and dissent involves breadth of application rather than the number of agents who act, although there is no hard and fast rule about this matter. Dave Buckel referred to his self-immolation as a protest, even though we often think of protests more collectively and speak of dissent as something that can be either individual or collective. We might speak of a publication, or posts on social media, or even the leaving of anonymous postcards across Berlin as instances of dissent, but the idea that they are also protests can be harder to place. It can be done; the agents concerned may clearly be protesting about something, but their actions do not involve paradigm instances of protest. They are not the first things that we would think of if someone was to say "a protest has occurred." They are more about the dissemination of words and critique rather than

actions of other sorts. We can generalize the point by saying that dissent *includes* protest but extends further to other practices. And this matches our regular use. Dissent extends to what is said as well as what is done in a more dramatic public fashion. It extends to inscription, blogging, whistleblowing, and all manner of speech acts. To words uttered or written.

The related concept of "the dissident," although more familiar in the context of Eastern Europe, is associated primarily with words rather than anything else. The concept was first introduced by Western journalists to describe agents in a state of conflict with Eastern Europe regimes precisely because appeal to a different term *beyond* protest and its limits seemed to make sense (Perelman 2019). The terminology was then imported back into the East, where it became standard currency in dissident circles, associated especially with a refusal to stay silent under extreme pressures to do so. Should we then move these two concepts of dissent and the dissident closer together? We might fuse them into a single elegant union in which dissent is the action and the dissident the actor. And here, the suggestion is not simply that dissidents themselves are engaging in various forms of dissent (which seems a fairly obvious point), but that dissent in general is the activity of dissidents. Such a move would involve a conceptual innovation of sorts, and there is nothing to rule out innovations. Semantic drift and deliberate shifts occur. Embracing it may be a better option than seeking out the "true" original meaning of terms before the world became confused: what it really means to be a socialist or left wing; what it truly means to be a feminist, to have a particular gender identity; or what it means to be a vegan. Others have acknowledged that the work we do with words involves continuously remaking them and not simply picking them up and laying them down afterwards. Gandhi appreciated the point and exemplifies an open attitude to conceptual reworking and innovation. His key term for spiritualized protest, *satyagraha*, emerged out of a public competition to come up with a new term. One rooted in Hindu spiritual traditions and commitment to truth. With the main body of the Congress Party, he also, and quite deliberately, shifted away from a colonialist terminology of "Home Rule" in the 1910s and the 1920s to one of "independence" and "Swaraj" (political and spiritual freedom), in order to mark a separation from the history and traditions of the European left, and from its deeply ambiguous relation to colonialism, its lack of awareness of its own racism, and its residual commitment to a continuing benevolent dominance. Conceptual innovation is a normal practice, in political life as elsewhere.

However, there are reasons for resisting the particular streamlining move just suggested, reasons to resist too neat an alignment between dissent and dissidents. These reasons can help us to understand the different sorts of work that the two concepts are routinely called upon to perform. Consideration of the option may then be thought of as a device to draw out the differences and thereby to give more content to the very idea of

dissent. The dissent of dissidents can sometimes be harder for authorities to deal with than public demonstrations, harder to deal with than a gathering of everything in one place. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the most famous dissident of the Soviet era, may or may not have attended public protests with banners or held placards and engaged in chants. Many of those who have read his iconic texts do not know whether he did or not. But we know that he was a dissident by virtue of his words and by virtue of the response of those in positions of political power. Again, the oppositional aspect of dissent comes out, but so does personal risk and exposure to harm at the hands of state functionaries. Similarly, when Jacek Kuron's and Karol Modzelewski's *Open Letter to the Party* was submitted to the Warsaw University branch of the Communist Party (the Polish United Workers Party) in 1965, it resulted in their arrest. The pair had advocated decentralized political control through independent workers councils, "a nationwide system of Councils of Workers' Delegate, headed by a Central Council of Delegates" (Kuron and Modzelewski 1982: 74). Effectively, a moment of return to a revolutionary past. The text ends with a recognition that arrest was a possible outcome:

> We do not know, of course, whether the authorities will decide, as a result of this letter, to apply repressive administrative measures to us or to try us in court. We consider, however, that we have *every right* to address ourselves to the political organizations which removed us from their ranks.
>
> (Kuron and Modzelewski 1982: 88)

Kuron and Modzelewski are iconic Polish dissidents and paradigmatic dissidents of the era, even though their original critique was couched in traditional Marxist language (and advanced the state capitalist idea that became popular around the time of the Sino-Soviet split). It was not couched in the more liberally oriented language of political freedom which they adopted later and through which they helped to shape the *Solidarność* movement of the 1980s. (Modzelewski is often personally credited with the new movement's name.) The presentation of matters in a sanctioned Marxist language allowed the text to assume an iconic status in the West among the Marxist-influenced students who rioted in Paris in 1968. Following the *Open Letter*'s translation into French and circulation among the protesting students, one of the leading figures (Daniel Cohn-Bendit) identified himself in court as "Kuron Modzelewski" when put on trial in January of the following year (Zubel 2019: 36). An indication, perhaps, of the extent to which sections of the left thought of the state as an enemy and of how little support for state control can be regarded as the unifying element across all shades of left identity.

In some respects, the mimicking of the official ideology and pointing out of failures to live up to it is characteristic of dissident literature. Or,

at least, it is characteristic of a certain phase of such literature, from Solzhenitsyn's earliest and Marxist influenced texts through to Vaclav Havel's *Power of the Powerless* (1978), a classic piece of Czech dissent whose opening mimics rather than follows Karl Marx, "A specter is haunting Eastern Europe, the specter of what in the West is called 'dissent.'" Havel's text comes from a later phase of the dissident movement, when such echoing is parody rather than a call to return to the source, to the original true meaning. This marks a partial boundary between the later text and the Kuron and Modzelewski *Open Letter.* There are multiple boundaries of this sort between the two, in terms of dissemination and influence. Kuron's and Modzelewski's text remained better known in the West until after the Soviet era, kept in circulation by the smaller left-wing groups who anticipated political upheavals resembling those in Hungary in 1956 and Poland in 1970. The left in the West anticipated upheaval along such lines, upheaval which appealed to Marx or turned back to Marxism, even when such ideas became increasingly divorced from the dominant lines of influence among dissidents in the East. Havel's text came to represent something closer to the norm among dissidents in the lead up to the collapse of the Soviet Bloc. It also exemplified a tendency to appeal to a shared and denied humanity. *To live in the truth, was to live a more fully human life*, it was not to return to some purer version of the Communist Bloc. While committing to a vast difference between the post-totalitarianism of the "utterly new social and political reality" (Havel 2018: 9) of the Bloc and the authenticity of the social movements that gave birth to it, Havel did not look toward a possible return, a rewinding to a moment when new societies might begin again.

Interestingly, he did try to bring dissent and the dissident close together, but the demands placed upon the dissident were always greater than the demands of merely engaging in dissent within broadly liberal contexts. And this risk factor is built into our ways of making sense of the concepts, and into our grasp of the transition between opposing bad things and actually becoming a dissident, which is something that can be associated with a particular act of protest or dissent, but need not reduce to it, or even to any single moment in time when the change occurs. Kuron and Modzelewski were arguably dissidents as soon as the *Open Letter to the Party* was submitted, perhaps as soon as they set pen to paper. A little like Winston Smith in George Orwell's novel *1984*, a man whose initial transformation occurs out of sight of the authorities (so he believes), but in full sight of the reader. Perhaps Kuron and Modzelewski were dissidents when they exchanged their initial ideas, or when they pushed the first typewriter key, or when they began to entertain dangerous thoughts about the possibility of speaking to others. And here, by dangerous thoughts I do not mean bold and unconventional thinking that carries no real physical risk, but thoughts that may lead to abrupt removal from the world of friends and opportunities. The point at which when dissidence

emerges is unclear. Its regular consequences are much clearer. Dissidents face prison, harassment, and the risk of sudden accidental death: accidental death as euphemism and accidental death as predictable misfortune.

III Dissidents and risk

There is a familiar political image of such accidental death, the suspicious death in custody. Here, we may think of iconic deaths when matters get out of hand. Occasions on which there is no planning, such as the death of Steve Biko in a South African jail in 1977. A death that launched 1,000 protests, helping to galvanize international support for the Anti-Apartheid movement. Suspicious deaths occur everywhere. Inside liberal democracies and (more conspicuously) outside of them. There have been multiple incidents in the US in recent times involving the deaths of Black members of the public who have no strong political affiliation, but who are treated very differently from white members of the public. There are multiple activisms which involve similar risks. There is an individual case of a peace campaigner at Greenham Common, multiple animal rights activists, multiple environmental campaigners, and multiple strikers on picket lines who have been accidentally killed in the course of protest. All within liberal democracies. Deaths do happen. Protests often take confrontational forms and confrontation can escalate or result in accident. There have also been occasional incidents over the past half century in which police have gone beyond any reasonable or defensible behavior. Dario Fo's play *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (1970) is a classic literary representation of the risks and deaths in question. Written in the aftermath of the Piazza Fontana bombing in December 1969. A bombing at a major bank in Milan that killed 17 and injured a further 88 people. The blame was initially attributed to the left, as another in a series of incidents of terrorism which were occurring as the optimism of 1968 broke down and groupings such as the Baader–Meinhof gang and Red Brigades emerged in Germany and Italy. The blame in the Piazza Fontana case was initially placed upon anarchists, one of whom, Giuseppi Pinelli, was a railway worker, who for mysterious reasons was alleged to have jumped to his death out of a window during an otherwise routine and unexceptional police interrogation. The evidence later strongly indicated that the far-right *Ordine Nuovo* was responsible for the bombing, although no action was taken until almost two decades later in different political times. Meanwhile, the police commissioner initially suspected of the anarchist's death had himself been killed, this time actually by left-wing militants connected to Lotta Continua, in a revenge attack. A circle of violence with multiple confusions and authorities drawn into complicity (Foot 2009).

Fo's play tracks a combination of familiar government inspector scenarios (someone is mistaken for a person of authority, which they misuse

to comic effect) and farce. There is singing, an appeal to childhood train sets, and the concoction of an absurd official version of events. The humor of the plot turns upon attempts to present the deceased as the victim of a series of events for which no one is to blame. Not suicide, not murder, nor anything other than the misfortune that might befall any of us, anywhere (Fo 2003: 62). Real accidents do occur, of course, even in police stations. Unintended deaths, when there is culpability without an intent to kill. Force may already be in play, and matters get out of hand. Dissidents sit toward the high-risk end of agents vulnerable to such things. Protestors face fines and occasional bodily harm. Dissidents face the loss of everything. In 1977, the aging and personally engaging Jan Potočka, a pivotal figure in the Czech movement for human rights, Charter 77, died of a heart attack after a day-long detention and police interrogation. The official intention seems to have been one of routine intimidation, geared to keeping Potočka busy during a sensitive political event, thereby limiting the hostile international publicity which might follow his attendance and whatever public statement he might make (Brinton 2020). Matters went badly wrong, resulting in death. A disaster for the authorities. One among many. In 1981, Jacques Derrida, Europe's most influential philosopher of the past half century, gained something of an insight into the difference between academic radicalism and the higher risks faced by dissidents when he fell foul of the same authorities chasing down the same cause. In December of that year, he arrived in Prague for a Charter 77 event, went for a tourist visit to the home of Franz Kafka, and was promptly arrested and incarcerated in Ruzyne prison (Peters 2013: 334–336). Derrida was held for three days on absurd charges of drug trafficking. A 19th century equivalent would be charging Freud or Einstein with culpability in a series of dog abductions. Absurdity beyond Fo's theatrical absurdity is no bar to mistreatment or to extreme and unintended consequences.

Being a dissident is also, at least from the point of view of the authorities, something of a full-time job. "From personal experience," Havel tell us:

> I know that there is an invisible line you cross - without even wanting to or becoming aware of it- beyond which they cease to treat you as a writer who happens to be a concerned citizen and begin talking of you as a 'dissident' who almost incidentally (in his or her spare time, perhaps?) happens to write plays as well.
>
> (Havel 2018: 72–73)

The line, as Havel saw it, was one between acting and being. Between merely *engaging in dissent* and *being a dissident*. A good number of authors in the Soviet states of the 20th century occupied ambiguous places in relation to this line. Yevgeny Zamyatin's dystopian *We* (1920, published 1924) was a satirical comment on the emerging Soviet system

and its problems penned by an old Bolshevik. An insider committed to the revolution. Something difficult to regard in anything like the same light as Solzhynitsyn's explorations of what had already gone wrong, and in irreversible ways. Zamyatin, after the experience of the response from the authorities, was clearly a dissident, a full-time dissident whose every action was scrutinized. But the Zamyatin who penned the text was something else, the occupant of a greyer area. But nonetheless someone vulnerable to the actions of the state in ways that those who engage in dissent within liberal democracies are not. At least, not typically.

Something similar applies to Mikhail Bulgakov. His *Heart of a Dog* (1925) was more openly a satire upon the new political system from a source known to be hostile to the new system. Not a revolutionary, not even a disillusioned one. A dog given the heart of an apparatchik slots right into the new world, while the scientist who transplanted the heart feels out of place. The dog demands documentation. After all, one can hardly live without papers. The scientist is under siege from a housing committee whose members can see the comrade dog's point of view. Bulgakov's secretly written *The Master and Margerita* (1928–1940) stretches critique further: a cat appears in Moscow and performs a magic act with the devil, producing worthless paper notes, in a theatre where foreign currency hoarders are exposed as enemies of the people. In spite of Stalin's qualified protection, it is difficult to classify Bulgakov as anything other than a dissident, subject to multiple risks. Vulnerable to the consequences of the wrong answer when asked whether he still wanted to leave the country.

Similarly, we might think of Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), whose account of carnavalesque dissent in Early Modern Europe, *Rabelaise and His World* (completed circa 1940) enthused about a public license and ability to level out hierarchies and mock all notions of ideological purity, in a way which was clearly at odds with the realities of contemporary Russia. At odds with it in a way that delayed publication for years. Or a little closer to our own time, we might think of the Strugatsky brothers and their thinly disguised picture of a bizarre social experiment in *The Doomed City* (1972). A text which opens with the need for improvised citizen columns to fight off the attacks of a troop of baboons, unleashed in the streets for no other reason than the fact that "The Experiment is the Experiment" (Strugatsky and Strugatsky 2016: 15). Yet, it too fell massively foul of the censor and, like so many great works, only saw the light of day in a decent edition in the late 1980 when the old system finally fell apart. All these well-known authors engaged in dissent, with degrees of risk. Yet, there are also respects in which there is a shading here from the clear-cut dissidents such as Havel and other forms of dissent which might incur heavy penalties. My suggestion then is that dissent in the Soviet bloc was significantly broader than the dissident circles and reached much further than underground *samizdat* literature. Although we may think of

dissidents as lone figures, they were generally part of something much larger. Perhaps the most striking case of this is the role of dissidents in *Solidarnosc*. They were certainly there, but the free trade union movement of the 1980s was far broader. Not a scaling-up of the dissident circles, but something quite different.

IV The normativity of "dissent"

In liberal democracies, we speak more often of activists and protestors than we do of dissidents. All these terms are, again, relational. All are oppositional, but differ in their normative force, in the appraisals and in the attitudes toward action and response which are built in. The concepts of "activists" and "protestors" lack any clear sense of the admirable life and death struggle against a political regime. The concept of dissident, in our regular ways of using it, has these built in. They are part of its normative content. But what is built in is a qualified admiration of the agents in question. Dissidents come in all shapes and sizes, with prominent neo-Nazi and occultist circles emerging in the Soviet Union as well as figures geared more to the visions of the left and of social democracy (Laruelle 2015).

The distinction between the normative content of "dissident" and "dissent" in our regular ways of using them is also not an indication that dissident literature can only shed light upon regimes rather than liberal democracies. Havel as well as Kuron and Modzelewski believed that dissident texts shed light on both, in spite of clear differences. My view is also that this is the more plausible view. Liberal democracies may often use soft power in authoritarian ways and engage in periodic exercises of extra-legal force. Yet, they are not authoritarian or totalitarian states. Nor are they fascist regimes. A great deal is tolerated, including protest. To deny the same context of a light and death struggle for dissent within liberal democracies is not to say that nobody ever dies from protesting, but rather that death in the course of a protest or of some other form of dissent is more often the result of misadventure rather than calculation. Nor is it a reasonably anticipated but unintended outcome, as in the case of Biko and Jan Potočka. When, for example, Black Lives Matter (BLM) protestors took to the streets of the US in 2020, following the killing of George Floyd by a police officer who knelt on his neck for several minutes, the protests themselves did not result in protestors being killed. In spite of the strong likelihood that any such actions might have been viewed sympathetically by the sitting president and those around him. Being Black and placed under arrest carries a greater risk than protesting about institutionalized racism, although the risk level increases when there is armed involvement outside of police control. As there was in Kenosha in August 2020, when two unarmed men, Joseph Rosenbaum and Anthony Huber, were killed by a 17-year-old white vigilante, Kyle Rittenhouse, during a BLM protest.

With allowance for periodic exceptions of this sort, protest in forms familiar within liberal democracies are *mostly* safe or safe *up to a point*. Those deliberately pursuing martyrdom may be pushed to take matters into their own hands, given that protest is safe in the way that driving a car is safe, even while fatalities occur and culpability is regularly assigned. Protest is a legally and culturally protected activity. It is not allowed on all occasions and in all ways. But there is no ethically compelling reason why it ought to be. Societies involve agents other than protestors, agents whose own activities and entitlements ought to be factored into any deliberation about rights, wrongs, and limitations. Demonstrations are typically curtailed in terms of routes, duration, dates, and sometimes through requirements to carry part of the financial burden of policing. But this falls into the territory of reasonable negotiation over the use of public space, even if it is open to manipulation. Other forms of dissent have their constraints too. Political criticism can be published, but not everywhere. Having an opinion does not generate a right to use someone else's online platform, or the front page of a newspaper, or to say just anything about anyone (Blacks, Jews, transpersons) without repercussions. There is, as Mill pointed out in his classic defense of free speech, a difference between free speech and incitement to bodily harm:

> An opinion that corn-dealers are starvers of the poor, or that private property is robbery, ought to be unmolested when simply circulated through the press, but may justly incur punishment when delivered orally to an excited mob assembled before the house of a corn-dealer, or when handed about the same mob in the form of a placard.
>
> (Mill 2000: 56)

But protest and other varieties of dissent under conditions of liberal democracy are tolerated as well as constrained and tolerated within fairly broad bounds. By contrast, being a dissident under more authoritarian conditions involves exposure to predictable forms of unintended excess. The way in which things go wrong as well as more deliberate behaviors can themselves be symptomatic of more authoritarian systems of public control.

None of this involves a denial of something obvious. The military are periodically used to break strikes within liberal democracies, and this occurs under governments of the left as well as the right. Voter suppression occurs (Blacks in the US at all modern times and Catholics in Northern Ireland up to, and in the aftermath of, the introduction of universal suffrage at the 1970 election). There are cases of brutal violence and arrests of elected officials (Catalonia following a 2017 referendum to leave Spain). In cases of these sorts, dissenting agents within liberal democracies may find themselves in a predicament reminiscent of dissidents in

authoritarian states. And if circumstances of this sort started to become the norm, we would have good reason to start speaking of dissent in terms of "dissidents" as well as mere "protest." But these are currently exceptions, not the norm. Liberal democracies have used authoritarian control, up to and including lethal force and military intervention in their areas of influence, to effect regime change for policy reasons and to stabilize the less democratic parts of the world. And this has been an ongoing feature of the foreign policy of leading liberal democratic powers. But domestically, they have always been less willing to use anything quite so authoritarian. Indeed, part of the legitimating sanction for the international use of force has been appeal to a more democratic set of domestic arrangements, indicating a larger commitment to good will and political freedoms. And while the plausibility of this claim may vary from case to case, a limitation of authoritarian responses to domestic dissent is inscribed within it. Accordingly, when we speak of dissent, we are not ordinarily attributing any special default courage in the face of a regime.

What may we conclude from this? One plausible conclusion would be that dissent is often less dramatic than the narratives which surround it. Activists may see their actions as continuous with high-risk traditions of 19th-century revolutionaries, early trade unionists, and agents who have continued to risk their lives and liberty in order to speak the truth to authoritarian forms of political power. Yet, there are strong discontinuities. Also, there are risks involved in a mischaracterization of dissent within liberal democracies, when such dissent is overly dramatized or when it is contextualized within a two-sided struggle comparable to that of dissidents and regimes rather than a more complex matter of navigating multiple interests, causes, and identities. Preparing for the downfall of a regime, that is, preparing for overthrowal or for a revolution justifies internal organizational discipline and a readiness to tolerate (even cover over) ethically dubious practices. Preparing for a revolution which has never arrived in any liberal democracy, anywhere and at any point in time, may involve sacrifices of interests and even of conscience for which there is no pay off or return. Something similar may be said about great plans for social transformation associated less with ideas of revolution and more with social democratic reform. It is far from obvious that the overestimation of what social democratic activism was likely to achieve has yielded any great social or political benefits. Views along these lines shape a good deal of contemporary dissent through an emphasis upon decentralization, the avoidance of bureaucratic control, and the absence of party loyalty or any strict organizational rigidity. Some of the grand idealism of the utopian projects of the 19th century may have been lost, and for many this is a disappointing realization. Liberal democracy and whatever successors it may have are unlikely to look like anything drawn up by Fourier, or Saint-Simon, or Karl Marx. But a recognition of this seems to have had little or no impact upon the

continuity of dissent. It does not seem to need any grand unifying ideals or any master narrative to connect the many fragments of protest and resistance to power or questionable norms. Some political agents engage in dissent under extreme and routinely dangerous circumstances and some engage in dissent under routine conditions of liberal democracy. Either way, there are always agents who engage in dissent, and the dissent that they engage in is overall socially significant. It may be a necessary feature of any approximation to a good society. And while there is often a considerable difference between dissent of the safer sorts and dissent of the more routinely dangerous dissident sort, there are aspects of the dissident experience such as commitment to truth rather than principles and an addressing of matters in terms of the predicament of humanity that may help to inch us further away from picturing dissent in line with the norms, theories, and problematic legacies of social democracy.

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3 Skepticism about Political Ethics

I Friends and enemies

Whatever else we say about the concept of the political, dissent is political, and the idea of an ethics of dissent is the idea of a political ethic. But the very idea of a political ethic is one that has been subject to some skepticism. A recognition of the way in which the politics of governance and the affairs of state seem to operate by their own rules may lead us to think it unreasonable or impractical to expect ethical considerations to play more than a marginal role. On a stronger version of such skepticism, the thought is not just the Machiavellian one that traditional morality, allied to a naivety about the world, is a poor guide to practical politics. Rather, the thought is that any conception of political ethics must be an actual *evasion* of the realities of political conflict. Carl Schmitt is the classic 20th-century exemplar of this skeptical line of thought. Schmitt's *Concept of the Political* (1932) claims that our understanding of the political must be protected against bourgeois intrusions from other domains such as morality. Intrusions that represent a specifically liberal softening of hard political realities. These hard realities involve a necessary contrast between friend and enemy rooted in the unchanging nature of the world:

> it is a fact that the entire life of a human being is a struggle and every human being symbolically a combatant. The friend, enemy, and combat concepts receive their real meaning precisely because they refer to the real possibility of physical killing. War follows from enmity. War is the existential negation of the enemy.
>
> (Schmitt 2007: 33)

Schmitt brings together a series of familiar ideas in a particularly disturbing and brutalist way. Linking a friend/enemy distinction to ethics and to the reduction or denial of the latter is by no means new. One of the definitions of justice rejected at the start of Plato's *Repubic* (334b) is the one offered by ill-fated Polemarchus that justice is a matter of helping friends and harming enemies. Ill-fated because he fell foul of his own

DOI: 10.4324/9780429022524-4

account and was executed following a military takeover, in the midst of a wave of popular feeling against wealthy metics, that is, resident aliens (Page 1990; Ferrari 2005: 11–12). His presence casts a shadow over the *Republic*. The definition is rejected for various reasons, the main one being that justice is not in the business of harming anyone. It does not pick out a scapegoat and then project anger onto them. This familiar discussion sits in the background of Schmitt's thinking on this matter and his own attempt to provide a narrowed down, essentialist definition of "the political." Schmitt's approach suggests that Polemarchus was halfway there in recognizing the essential place of the friend/enemy distinction within politics. But that he did not go far enough, he did not sever the connection between the distinction and justice, and hence the result was moralized rather than going to the heart of the matter of *the political*. His consolations were of a misleading and dangerous sort. Other metics who recognized the dangers stayed down in Piraeus and were able to escape. Polemarchus stayed in Athens itself and was caught. Imagining that justice was a safeguard could be a dangerous thing to do in a world of politics shaped by the amoral realities of friendship and the designation of enemies (enemies who may have done nothing wrong). Imagining that the distinction is one of morality or ethics rather than brute politics alone offers consolations taken up by bourgeois liberal thinkers who lack the courage to take matters upon themselves, and instead want the security of a special moral sanction for their actions and for the safety of their property. The language here draws from Schmitt, the hostility to the bourgeois and the liberal is his and not mine.

Within the opposed liberal view, leaning upon morality on the one hand and market economics on the other, the interests of humanity might somehow be brought to coincide around some political agenda if only the extremes could be contained. For Schmitt, this amounted to a fantasy about what we are. A depoliticization, a refusal to accept the need for an enemy if we ourselves are to have any authentic political identity at all. And by enemies, he does not mean something vague like an opposing viewpoint, but actual people. "The friend and enemy concepts are to be understood in their concrete and existential sense, not as metaphors of symbols, not mixed and weakened by economic, moral and other conception" (Schmitt 2007: 27–28). Enemies do not have to be bad or even on the wrong side (from some extra-political standpoint). But they do need to be there and to be identified as enemies. Much of this line of thought is focused upon self-constitution and ultimately upon themes from Kierkegaard's 19th-century idea that faith is central to the constitution of an authentic self. We make ourselves through commitment, and ultimately through faith characterized by a "teleological suspension of the ethical," that is, a deliberate choice to follow a path which no rational ethical deliberation could ever compel us to (Kierkegaard 2006: 46–58). The idea at stake is not fanaticism, but *self-constitution*.

Acceptance that there is a choice to be made and that it should not be evaded in the manner of good bourgeois hypocrites, who say one thing but do another. Rather, responsibility for choice and for self must be embraced. A problem for Kierkegaard was that ethics was only set aside on an implausibly narrow understanding of what ethics is, an understanding that reduced it to some set of universal principles grounded in rationality alone. Ethics, on his approach toward it, is very much in line with the design for ethics set out in the fable of the colonial ethicists from the opening of this book. But if ethics is thought of otherwise to include matters of self-constitution, ways of seeing, and commitment, then there will be no suspension of the ethical, but only an illusion or pretense of operating beyond its bounds. Ethical commitment will be concealed and not suspended or superseded. This is a point that has not been lost upon critics of Kierkegaard or critics of Schmitt, who inherits much the same difficulty, that is, an implausibly narrow conception of the moral. And here, it does not matter greatly whether we speak of ethics or of morality, a point of terminology on which Kierkegaard and Schmitt happen to differ.

Schmitt's attack upon an inclusion of the moral within the political was, of course, from the far right. Not simply the political right, but much further along the spectrum, from a fellow traveler (at the time of *The Concept of the Political* a sympathizer and shortly afterwards a member) of the Nazi Party. Someone who was among the layer of intellectuals brought in by the Nazis and then displaced in favor of homegrown talent, less liable to imagine that National Socialism was an open ideology, something that could be reshaped through the academy. Schmitt rejected the de-Nazification processes at the end of the war, regarding the attempt to bring moral standards into political matters as little more than a foreign intrusion. Yet his own approach did not come from anything like an ethically or morally neutral standpoint, but presupposed a hostility to bourgeois life, and a commitment to truthfulness about the cowardice and deceptions of the latter, the stripping away of specifically bourgeois liberal illusions associated with parliamentary democracy and restrictions upon the state. His attack upon liberalism and its norms has, however, become popular on the left in recent years in texts such as Chantal Mouffe's *On the Political* (2000), where the setting aside of Schmitt is treated as moralism and symptomatic of the broader moralization of politics. "What is happening is that nowadays the political is played out in the *moral register*. In other words, it still consists in a we/they distinction, but the we/they, instead of being defined with political categories, is now established in moral terms" (Mouffe 2000: 5). But while the level of left borrowing from Schmitt is new, it is not entirely novel. There has been a long-standing left interest in Schmitt, going back to the mid-century and the Frankfurt School which has tended to shift into something else. Something closer to a displacement of Marx's class analysis by Schmitt's populist

anti-liberalism. Anti-capitalist critiques, rooted in the imagery of socialism and anarchism, have tended to slide toward Schmitt or into confusions of Marx and Schmitt and an assumption that Marx was more hostile to the market than to the state. This is a confusion of our times. The idea that the state is the friend of the left is familiar from social democracy rather than Marxism. Indeed, the critiques of the Soviet and Chinese regimes of the 1950s, mentioned in the opening chapter, frequently toyed with the idea that one or other of these regimes was merely state capitalist and not socialist at all. (A point on which Marx's analysis in *Capital* may well be indeterminate. Plausible extensions can be run for and against, but they are extensions rather than cases of direct inference.)

The upshot of left enthusiasm for ideas which stem from Schmitt is a reinforcement of tendencies toward a blurring of distinctions of left and right, making crossovers between the two more readily sanctioned. Such crossovers have some earlier precedents. The Communist Parties of the late 1920s and early 1930s argued that capitalism had entered into a social fascist phase and that the political center (and not the anti-bourgeois far right) was now the real enemy. Hence the notable cases of cooperation between Communists and the Nazi party, the most prominent and disastrous of which was the Berlin transport strike of 1932 (again, mentioned in the opening chapter). It is tempting to say that such promiscuous cooperation tended to be around an idea that capitalism itself was the target and that varying socialisms (Marxist and National) stood as alternatives. However, this too would not be quite right. The social democratic parties of Europe originated with a strong connection to Marxism, a connection which lasted in some cases up until the 1950s. But multiple divisions were always present. Tendencies to direct attention away from capitalism as such and toward particular variants against which anger might more easily be directed. The financial system and bankers have repeatedly been a popular target, with theories of "finance capitalism" becoming popular at an early point. Rudolf Hilferding's *Finance Capital* (2007) is probably one of the best-known works of early 20th-century Marxist economics, and at its heart is the idea that banking and industrial capital has fused under the overall dominance of the banks. Capitalism has centralized, in ways which present the capitalist class as coordinated and integrated, a cohesive enemy. One might figuratively imagine them in a room where a single policy toward the proletariat might be adopted. Such centralization through the state is also treated as a move toward socialism. Overall, this involves a target which has helped to blur Marxism into a special hostility toward the market rather than capitalism per se. And thereby lessened the gap between a Marxist influenced left and Schmitt's far-right, anti-bourgeois political analysis, with both sharing a commitment to the primacy of the state, the centralization of state power, and a rhetoric of radicalism in contrast to a decadent and purely self-interested bourgeoisie.

We can also see in such ideas, particularly the hostility toward financiers and bankers, a move toward the contemporary targeting of neoliberalism in contrast with capitalism. A targeting of a very Schmittian sort, but the target itself is not always so clear. Neoliberalism has been defined in multiple and elusive ways, with various bodies, individuals, and groups of people standing as proxy for neoliberalism or a neoliberal agenda. But generally, such critiques share a special hostility toward the market-based aspects of capitalism. Although in some variants of the narrative, the state or the neoliberal state is itself viewed as an arena in which neoliberal pro-market elites are assumed to operate conspiratorially or out in the open. Multiple forms of dissent are then regarded as intersectionally tied together, as friends in a life-or-death struggle against this cohesive neoliberal enemy. Any ethics of dissent then disappears or reduces to alignment rather than a navigation of complexities. But to say this is not at all to reject the value of a concept of intersectionality in the sense originally used, that is, as a reasonable enough point that different forms of oppression can intersect and interact with one another in complex ways. However, it has tended to drift toward the less plausible idea that fighting against one thing automatically interconnects with a struggle against all oppression. This is a view that tends to underestimate the ways in which dissent over causes which are legitimate can also be implicated in prejudice, discrimination, and the oppression of others. A binary conception of struggle will tend to put agents on one side or the other, the good or the bad, friends or enemies. Within a binary framework, it is also understandable that talk about ethics might seem to blunt the harsh realities and necessities of the great conflict against political enemies who may not themselves observe constraints upon how they fight, driven as they are by an overriding bourgeois desire to remove the element of risk from their lives.

It is also understandably that a loose mapping of Marxism onto Schmitt and Schmitt onto Marxism might also seem plausible, given Marx and Engel's insistence upon the scientific status of Marxist and the longstanding reluctance of Marxist and socialist authors to be drawn on questions of ethics. Or, to be overtly hostile to such questions as a sort of bourgeois moralizing. For example, Jack London in his guise as prominent campaigner of the Socialist Party in the US during the 1910s was fond of referring to sweet ideals and dear moralities (London 2018: 4–5) associating them with bourgeois society and weakness. The reluctance to engage in this area has been general but not universal. A small cluster of prominent Marxist thinkers from Joseph Dietzgen and Karl Kautsky to Evgeny Preobrazhensky and Trotsky did try to say something orderly about Marxism and ethics, with each going over the territory of the others, but never advancing very far. The best known of the texts is Trotsky's *Their Morals and Ours* (1938), but its focus is not exactly scholarship. The best-known scholarly treatment of the question remains

Stephen Lukes's *Marxism and Morality* (1985), which characterizes Marx's treatment of morality as an expression of class struggle and the prevailing morality as essentially an extension of the interests of the capitalist class. It hardly needs to be said, but Marxism is a remarkable complex body of theories, quirks, and insights. The need for a plausible and non-reductionist narrative about morality has always been one of its blind spots. It is easy to see how its tendency toward reductionism in this area might be mapped onto Schmitt's reduction of the political and disdain for intrusion from bourgeois moral commitments.

The dangers of reading a multilayer and multiplayer environment such as politics in Schmitt's binary way are not hard to see. There is an oversimplification of political dynamics with plurality pushed into the domain of the external relations between states, which are then allowed to exist in more of a pluriverse. When reduced in this way, there is little sense of the need for a complex navigation of the ethical issues. What matters instead is alignment, being on the right side, and ends-means deliberation about strategy and tactics in the conflict. The conflict itself then becomes something analogous to war by other means. A suggestion that Schmitt was sensitive to, responding through an emphasis upon the lifelong nature of political struggle by contrast with the more limited timespan of warfare (Schmitt 2007: 33–37). There is also the risk of distilling the needed enemy down into some particular political party or group of people, who are then attributed excessive influence in public affairs and who end up subject to disproportionate targeting for imaginary wrongs and ordinary human failings. As the readily observed events are unlikely to confirm that anyone wields such influence, covert influence is then posited. Jews have historically been the obvious target and were a preferred enemy for Schmitt, as they have been for sections of the left who hold that the enemy global neoliberal elite clustered around banking and finance are themselves taken to be implicated in Zionism. Such a heavy antisemitic framing of matters has an obvious ethical component, a friend/enemy distinction which is not only ethically laden, but moralistically driven, and not in a good way. The realities of power as multiply diffused become overly simplified into a binary contrast, one pole of which is good and the other bad, and often Zionist.

II Exclusion of ethics in favor of means-ends deliberation

Even if we set aside any sort of appeal to the friend/enemy conceptual machinery of Schmitt and focus instead upon practical politics rather than "the political" (something more conceptual), the idea that ethics might play little actual role within politics retains a certain plausibility. It is an idea that does not go away with the passing of any particular generation. It has been well represented not only in accounts of dissent, but also in accounts of international affairs. A classic statement in the latter

context is Dean Acheson's "Ethics in International Relations Today." Delivered as an address at Amherst College toward the end of 1964, it is a *before the fall* statement. The Soviet Union was clearly faltering with dissent beginning to emerge and the US was yet to experience its own traumatic awakening of wartime disasters. Acheson was the former US Secretary of State and a figure of high standing. The war in Vietnam had not yet gone terribly and publicly wrong in the way that it did in the months that followed, producing a massive surge of casualties. Deaths climbing from less than 500 over the previous eight years to more than 10,000 a year. Year in and year out. In the process, the idea that the domestic freedoms of liberal democracy were a reliable guarantor of defensible action on the world stage began to unravel. Acheson argued for something far less radical than Schmitt, although both presented reductionist views about the nature of politics. In a sense, Acheson represented the bourgeois world that both were part of, but which Schmitt could not come to terms with. His address contained none of the appeals to a self-authenticating domain of ethics transcending choice, but the much simpler idea that ethics is primarily a matter of the relations between private individuals. Such relations could be governed by principles that the individuals might happen to hold or break, but which would introduce an unnecessary rigidity if they were applied within the political sphere. Ethics was also in the business of pursuing excellence or perfection, but politics was not. Nothing in the affairs of state, especially in foreign relations, corresponds to such a pursuit or to regret over falling short when arrangements involve reasonable compromise. This cuts into the idea of an exclusion of ethics in a very different way from the anti-bourgeois appeals of Schmitt. For Acheson, the collection of "moralisms, maxims, and slogans, which neither help nor guide" but which pass for ethics within political life, could only get in the way. "Decisions are not helped by considering them in terms of sharing, brotherly love, the Golden Rule, or inducting our citizens into the kingdom of heaven" (Acheson 1964). The proper approach in politics was not ethical, but strategic. We *ought* to pursue the single goal of preserving and fostering an environment within which free societies might flourish, with the free societies in question being Western-style liberal democracies. In other words, the bourgeois liberalism that Schmitt despised but which has yielded a great deal in terms of the overall well-being of persons.

There is a distinction at work in Acheson's account, between what is internal and what is external. The external rationale for politics might well be set in terms of a goal (securing an environment for free societies), which does look unambiguously ethical. By contrast, internal evaluation within politics once the goal was set was simply a matter of strategic appraisal or means-ends deliberation. Anyone who drills down into the details of his lecture will see that Acheson's position also mingles talk about ethics with talk about morality, as I have done. He refers to "ethical

principles," but also to "moral propriety." And this shift between the two can be a source of confusion. After all, we often think of morality as something formal, tending at times toward *moralism*, and involving a focus upon restriction and rules. Nietzsche thought of it a little along these lines and so too did Schmitt. It has become common to carve ethics apart from morality, with the greatest of these two being ethics (Williams 2011). Or, at least, it is the most interesting of the two. The concepts that morality brings into play are thin and general. Ethics, by contrast, is more particularistic and covers a more personal engagement with things. As an illustration of the distinction, we face multiple ethical decisions on a daily basis, but only occasionally ask ourselves about which moral principle we ought to apply or "How do I act like a good Buddhist in this situation?," or "What is the correct socialist response?," or "What would Jesus do?" These are not the routine questions of daily life.

In line with this, although referring to both, I will tend to favor talk about ethics over talk about morality. However, the two will be used as interchangeable because of the subject matter. Too rigid a distinction might lead us to misunderstand what others are trying to say when they switch between one concept and the other. It might lead us to imagine that they are talking about one thing when they are actually talking about something else. Whichever concept we prefer, Acheson does seem to have grasped the limitations of principles. Much of his position flows from this, and it is something that aligns well with contemporary patterns of dissent in which there is growing talk about "values" rather than or alongside the appeals to "matters of principle," or of "socialist principles," or "fundamental political principles." The latter is a language more familiar from 20th-century political activism of the left. Yet, if the fable of the colonial ethicists in the opening chapter is correct, the shift from talk about principles to talk about fundamental values is merely a change of emphasis within a problematic understanding of what ethics is and does.

III The expressive dimension of dissent

When we shift our attention away from the business of governance to dissent, the scope for ethics within political life is more obvious and broader. Dissent after all is critical. It has an embedded set of ethical attitudes within it. People rarely take to the streets over procedure alone or in the belief that governments, employers, or those in positions of power are behaving sub-optimally, but in a way which is otherwise beyond reproach. Dissent is also not constrained by the practical needs of statecraft or by the everyday norms of diplomacy that Acheson and his successors have had to deal with. It is also expressive, just as action in any other context is expressive. In fairness to Acheson, we may read an acceptance of this into his words and into his difference from Schmitt: a

tacit belief that democratic values would in some way feed through in the means used and not merely the ends secured. That it was safe for a great democracy to set political matters apart from talk about ethical principles because great democracies could ultimately be relied upon to do the right thing, with allowance for errors of judgment in place. But perhaps this reads too much into his words when it should be acknowledged that he was simply mistaken, even naïve, about what democracies are. After all, what makes democratic practices democratic is not electoral procedure alone. There can be many different kinds of democratic procedure. Rather, the procedure expresses commitment to various norms concerning respect for persons. Norms that we make sense of through talk about freedom (liberty), equality, and citizenship as a fraternity or social solidarity based upon the other two rather than upon appeals to blood and soil or upon appeals to the practical necessity for cohesion. Actions express commitment to values, and are not simply the result of means-ends deliberation, in which the selection of ends is the only point at which ethical deliberation kicks in.

In the case of dissent, these things are more obvious than they are in international relations. There is a sense in which the actions of dissenting agents are likely to be *as* expressive as they are goal directed, although here I am not really making a quantitative claim, but a claim of another sort. A claim about the remoteness of securing desired ends. Consider an extreme case, outside of the bounds of liberal democracy, in order to illustrate something about protest within its bounds. A case of dissent that involves dissident behavior. In Hans Fallada's 1947 novel *Everyone Dies Alone* the central character is Otto Quangel, a working-class man who fixes things with his hands, lives in a shabby apartment, and tries to keep out of politics; but when his son is killed at the Front, he and his wife Elise begin to leave postcards across Berlin attacking Hitler. At first, his wife wonders *is that all, and nothing more dramatic*? But then realizes that, in a sense, one cannot risk more than one's life and that the regime in question rests upon an unwillingness of ordinary agents to risk this much. What were they hoping to accomplish by the act? In the novel, which is based upon a real-life case, they imagine a great ripple effect and many secret conversations and the circulation of the cards, a spark that sets off a firestorm of dissent. The hope is utterly unrealistic. But when confronted with the ineffectual nature of the campaign, the realization that their cards have almost all been swept up by the Gestapo, the couple do not see their actions as worthless. They worry about the harm that may be visited upon others following on from their actions. Yet, if all they could do was this, it would still be done. It is a sign of a deeper hope than that of personally sparking off the overthrowal of Hitler. Hope that evil would eventually fall and that it might be resisted. Saying this need not exclude acceptance that the actions in question also emerge out of personal grief. The actions of the Quangels are a sign of grief in the face

of loss. But it does seem that we can accommodate these things together, at least for a time. Nor is this only a story. Otto and Elise Hampel (the Quangels in the novel) were executed for crimes against the state in 1943 because of the actual case of the cards. And rarely has anyone looked quite so pleased in a police photograph as Otto. This is not a story of unalloyed or saintly moral goodness, although it is one of heroism. The imaginative retelling of the unusual events by Fallada (2010) mixes in a narrative of risk and of special existential moments or staking one's life that makes a person feel alive. Common themes on the literature of the Conservative right in Germany, from at least the First World War onwards. Ernst Junger's *In Storms of Steel* (1920) is very much in this territory. Schmitt might have approved of these things, and they certainly line up with his anti-bourgeois narrative. Yet, the theme of risk is hardly unique to this literature, and the risk in question is simply one that goes with being a dissident. The Hampels do seem to have operated as dissidents and not merely protestors. In real life and in the fictional version of events, nothing like a rebellion against bourgeois morality is involved.

My point is not about inscribing any dubious and special image of anti-bourgeois heroism into dissent of this or any other sort. Rather, it is a point about the remoteness of securing any particular desired outcome. When confronted with its reality, they (the Quangels) do not change their view of the card leaving, except to think that there might have been betters ways of getting it done. There is a commonality in their attitude and in the attitude that shapes most contemporary dissent. After all, the vast majority of the latter now occurs online in posts on social media. It takes the form of short, card-like segments of text where agents like ourselves express frustration, or anger, or dislike (even hatred) of some or other political circumstance, political figure, or measure, or party. Most of us do not do this in the mistaken belief that our words will ever go viral or that they may become the rallying point for a great change. If we were to know in advance that only one other person would read what we say and that there would be no further sequel, it is not clear that we would stop. Perhaps we are thinking out loud a good deal of the time when we do these things. But an audience of even one may be enough if we cannot bear to remain silent about some matters, especially when the cost of speaking out is so low. Our actions are, like most dissent, clearly expressive. But they are only up to a point goal directed. We aspire to various goals, but it seems odd to imagine that we are bringing them about by posting on social media, or marching in the streets, or sharing online links, or anything else of this sort.

We can also see the importance of the expressive dimension of dissent when it includes some prefigurative component, as it did with the Occupy protests and the Extinction Rebellion protests of the 2010s. That is to say, it can involve acting in ways which aim to model future political processes rather than acting in ways which oppose but do not in any way

reconstruct the relations between humans. In the case of the Occupy movement, this prefigurative component involved various forms of consensus deliberation, exercises in direct democracy which were not based upon majority voting or upon unanimous agreement, but upon finding an option that all or most could live with, even if none considered it ideal (Milligan 2013). A different and more direct form of democracy than the kind that we are used to. Consensus deliberation of this sort carries its own risks, for example, the generation of paradoxes, such as the Abilene Paradox, in which everyone ends up pursuing an option that nobody actually wants, but everyone (or almost everyone) finds acceptable. However, no system of collective decision-making is paradox free (Harvey 1974), and there is an implicit recognition in such an approach that there really is no *will of all the peopl*e at any point in time, nor is there a will of "the 99%." Rather, there is multiplicity, polyphony, many different opinions which deserve respect or fail to do so. Consensus deliberation can also be somewhat protracted, with the result that it has a recentralizing tendency, an element of survival of the most patient and the most committed. The pursuit of a compromise may become problematic, not for the reasons that Schmitt claimed (that it depoliticizes by obscuring the sense that others are enemies), but rather because a process that respects all or most may proceed so slowly that participation dwindles.

In the case of Extinction Rebellion, the aim (in the sense of going about matters in a particular way rather than in the sense of political objective) was to go beyond the recognizable problems of applying consensus deliberation within the context of dissent and to introduce other systems such as "holacracy." In the latter, subgroups are fully authorized to act on their own initiative without having to go through the seemingly interminable process of seeking agreement from larger bodies (Robertson 2015). These experiments in democracy, more specifically in direct democracy, might be read unfavorably as a naïve belief that entire societies can ultimately be organized along exactly the same lines as a few thousand protestors. A naïve belief, because most direct democracy at a societal level is not at all like this and cannot be like this. When the numbers grow, direct systems require processes such as referenda, voter initiative in the proposal of legislation, and recall of elected representatives. Face-to-face town hall meetings, such as those of direct democracy in Vermont or in the Swiss Cantons, are a rare thing and can only do so much. Experiments in democracy may also be prone to revert to hierarchy on grounds associated with Weber's critique that direct democracy is inherently unstable because of specialization, administration by notables, and the likelihood of some analogue of a party system emerging (Weber 2013: 290–292; Bernstein, Bunch, Canner and Lee 2016). We may say all these things, and draw all these qualifications, without obscuring the expressive dimension of attempts to show that things may be organized differently and that our current ways of doing things is seriously flawed.

What is involved in such cases is showing and expressing rather than just telling. As such, they have similarities to radical practices which predate the emergence of social democracy. Mid-19th-century cooperative movements would be an example. And similarities to traditions that emerged out of social democracy, but with a troubled relationship to their parent. Here, we may think of the antinuclear movement of the 1980s, and particularly the protest camp against cruise missiles at Greenham Common formed in 1981 after protests by a Welsh activist group *Women for Life on Earth*, declared "woman only" in 1982, and disbanded in 2000 following the relocation of nuclear weapons and the election of a Labour Government committed to a continuing nuclear military strategy. In the meantime, the camp had outlived a wave of antinuclear protests across Europe and the US, with demonstrations of up to 500,000 in major European cities in 1981 and a claimed 1,000,000 people march in New York the following year. The mass protests stopped, autonomously organized feminism in the UK went into a tailspin of decline, the weapons were moved elsewhere, and pressure came from the main social democratic parties whose platforms all embraced a pro-nuclear approach. Still, the camp continued tenaciously, albeit with dependence upon the participation of Labour activists and upon practical grassroots support. The accidental death of a young activist, Helen Wyn Thomas, in August 1989, when she was struck by a police vehicle just a couple of weeks before her 23rd birthday, made closure of the camp a difficult idea. As with all protest camps and many protests, the question of how to end them raises difficulties, given that some political agents will always want to keep going irrespective of any prospect of further impact. Debates over such matters can become more intense when the authorities do not move in and clear sites, thereby satisfying protesters that they have not chosen to leave but have been forced to do so. In the Greenham case, the primary impact of the camp was exhausted long before the protest was brought to an end. Nonetheless, it is a plausible precursor for the current trend toward enacting futures within dissent. If the Occupy movement takeover of Zucotti Park in New York in 2011 had been designed rather than spontaneous and accidental, the Greenham Common camp would have been a good model to draw upon. Another way of making the same point would be to imagine speaking to someone in the 1980s and telling them about the look and feel of early 21st-century protest. It seems more likely that we would highlight the Greenham Common peace camp rather than the year-long UK miners' strike of 1984–1985, even though the causal impact of the latter has been far greater. (Direct influence of Greenham is difficult to gauge and perhaps easily overstated.) It is also difficult to imagine that the "women only" approach, which was much criticized by a contemporary left which remained largely male dominated, was shaped primarily by means-ends deliberation rather than being a way

of saying or expressing something about the shortcomings of the world. (And the world of politics, in particular.)

Thinking of matters at this level of granularity, in terms of the phenomenology of protest and sense of guilt and relief when it ends, is also different from asking familiar but higher order questions such as "Do you think that violence ever justified?" or "Is it wrong to participate in riots?" The latter are interesting issues; however, a focus upon them on their own runs the risk of not drilling down deeply enough into actual practice and what it is like to be in the midst of protest or committed to the latter. It can again be a little like focusing upon principles or values rather than what it is political agents do and feel. It is, for example, entirely possible to provide answers to the question about violence without asking anything at all deep about the connection between dissent and the longing of humans to fix things that are broken, or which work badly, or in the wrong way. There is a sense of longing that goes deeper than disputes about the legitimacy of particular kinds of action and deeper than disagreements about what kinds of direct democracy we might possibly have in the future.

This deep part of what agents do when they (or we) engage in dissent is often *not* captured by discussions of proposed alternatives, strategies, or resolutions. An odd thing about so much 20th-century dissent and its successor versions is that so much of it involved meetings and hard-fought battles over nothing more than words on paper. Activities can seem shallow and even delusional, if we think of activism only as goal-directed behavior. Most goals are not secured as few resolutions have ever led anywhere. By contrast, one of the many striking things about the underground literature of Eastern European dissidents (some instances more than others) is an implicit grasp of this distanced from outcomes. A sense of distance that dissidents share with the Gandhi of the *Gita* lectures, a grasp that actions, such as the act of saying things which have been left unsaid, can be important in their own right. Dissent is not primarily a policy forum, but a collection of practices which bring the prevailing order of things into question. We can see an understanding of something along these lines in Vaclav Havel's iconic dissident text *The Power of the Powerless* (1978), when the text circles repeatedly around an opening of imagined incident in which a shopkeeper puts a sign saying "Workers of the World Unite!" in his window. The reader gets a sense of Havel's attempt to say something deep about what it is to be the ambiguous creatures that we are, and how human actions may be read in very different ways when read politically. This is not always so clear in the case of Western-style demonstrations, public protests, and political movements within liberal democracies, where a routine of objecting and a culture of dissent are less disrupted by the operations of the state and where dissent can easily slip into habit or ossify into a thoughtless

repetition and established ways of doing things. When such ossification occurs, the expressive dimensions of dissent may be compromised.

In a certain sense, there are few things so conservative as the traditions of dissent which became established in liberal democracies of the West in the late 19th and 20th centuries, the golden era of social democracy. There was a great deal of repetition and justification by appeal to what was done in the past. Protests occurred with banners depicting other protests with banners in a sequence that envisaged other protests in the future which might later commemorate the actions of the present. Activists operated as archivists, convinced that the ephemeral leaflets and publications of the moment would have historic significance and be cherished by generations in a world transformed. Yet, a grasp that actions can matter in their own right, irrespective of failures to secure any particular stated goal, can still be found even in such protests. Perhaps not so much on the surface, and not with the obviousness of commitment to expressive practice seen at Greenham Common, but in the ambiguities, gaps, and aspirations for different ways of doing things. In the parts of protests that do not simply reflect the belief that *this is the right means to a particular end*, and which may not even require any clear sense of a determinate end being pursued at all.

Here, we are in the territory of presenting a different image or picture for what has already been said, not in the territory of adding a further argument. One picture may leave us unmoved, but another may allow us to appreciate a point or to see something that we might otherwise miss. In the present case, the hope is that engaging in dissent *without subordinating it to any strict means-ends deliberation* might be better understood. Examples can make a difference. And there is a striking one that may help to convey the point. A contrast between dissent which proceeds without necessarily having any particular sense of where things will end, or what success might look like, and dissent which takes the form shaped by classic trade union organization and disputes. The latter have their ambiguities but tend toward clearly stated grounds for complaint and objectives which industrial action (or the threat of it) then tries to secure. As noted before, trade unions play an important role within liberal democracies and would probably play an important role within any approximation to a good society, which continues to have something like class divisions or divisions between more powerful employing bodies and less powerful groups of employees. However, trade unions are also bureaucratic organizations with established procedures and officials who are caught up in consequentialist or means-ends reasoning of a sort which is alien to a good deal of protest. In retrospect, this makes the persuasiveness of 20th-century social democratic pictures of the world a little difficult to understand, given the extent to which the strike was treated as the paradigm of protest. One of the problems of traditional social democracy, perhaps a partial explanation of its ongoing downfall,

is the collapse of the idea that strikes are *the* normal form of protest to which all other protests aspire. The tension between trade union activity and the broader range of things that people actually care about has become increasingly apparent. Not only because of large one-off events such as the short-lived Occupy movement, but also because of protests over matters such as the environment and animal rights. These are issues with an awkward relationship to social democracy or even to "the left" as traditionally conceived (Kymlicka and Donaldson 2014) and with very little connection to traditions of trade unionism. While determinate *and immediate* goals are pursued by such movements, their pursuit is not always the only or main thing going on, and their accomplishment is often unlikely. Strikes share something with activism of this sort, because they can assume a momentum of their own which is independent of the stated grounds of complaint. But they are also interruptions in the more regular activity of trade unions, the vast majority of which does not involve strike action or the threat of strike action but routine of other sorts. The clear-cut goals of industrial disputes may rarely be realized in full, but participants ordinarily have a good idea of what they would like to happen if a dispute should end in their favor. Immediate goals of this sort are often hard to match in other kinds of dissent. Few eco-demonstrators expect to wake up the next morning to find that the world has changed because they have done their job well or as well as it may be done. And part of the unlikelihood concerns the nature of the goals by contrast with the goals of trade union activity. After all, no government can simply stop permafrost melt in the way that a government or a company can decide to concede a wage increase.

Some of the cases of dissent which are most like trade union disputes, in the sense of having very clear and attainable immediately attainable goals, are spoken of as "direct action." A concept with roots in the anarchist tradition (Carter 2005: 6). Direct action includes the blocking of logging companies by eco-activists and the rescuing of animals from slaughter, from egg production, or from laboratory experimentation. As action, deeds rather than talk (although communication or *sending a message* may still be involved), these forms of dissent still tend to differ from trade union activity in obvious ways. Those who engage in direct action of the kinds just mentioned are rarely concerned with *only* the immediate problem which sits before them. Their activity again expresses a sense of something larger and of value, in relation to which the strategic thinking which is characteristic of trade unionism and governance may be a blunt tool. Direct action can accommodate such strategic thinking, but often it takes place without it, without any clear idea of what might ultimately be won. While trade unionism has also involved ongoing commitment to broader ideals, in doing so it has shaded into something else. But the something else has tended to be traditional social democracy and its offshoots, with the idea of social change looping back around to

a model rooted in trade unionism. Yet, even dissent of this sort may be understood as expressing a form of social hope, and this marks a point of continuity with dissent of various other kinds.

IV Social hope

Emphasizing the importance of the expressive component of dissent need not reduce to the replacement of consequentialist or means-ends deliberation as the sole or primary focus of ethical evaluation. There is no need to set up expressive role as a new sovereign concept in the place of the old one. The emphasis here, upon what it is that agents are doing and expressing, is largely for the purposes of dethroning. It is a way of showing that political agents who engage in dissent are not characteristically executing strategies to arrive at determinate goals. In line with the idea of a modest particularism, where no one thing or principle is dominant or even needs to play exactly the same role from case to case, the approach taken is one which involves a more multifactor analysis. The weighing up of more than consequences compared to means used, principles followed, and values expressed. There are a range of other ethically salient factors to consider as well across a range of cases. Even when we highlight the expressive role of dissent and of protests, we may also want to do justice to the fact that most of the actions in question express more than one thing at any given time, and they may often express values that clash. We are not automatically more coherent in our political lives than we are at any other time. And time matters too, or rather *timeliness*. A strike that inadvertently paves the way for the overthrowal of a flawed democracy in favor of a brutal dictatorship cannot be justified simply by appeal to the merits of its direct cause. A public protest during an epidemic may also be ethically problematic, even something to be resisted, even if the cause is otherwise a good one, which is not to say that it is always a bad idea, merely that it can be a bad idea and simply a wrong thing to do in a more than strategic sense. These points may seem so obvious that they come close to being platitudes, until we think again about 20th-century patterns of political advocacy and activism in which causes tended to be supported or at least viewed sympathetically on the basis of little more than *the form of protest* involved. From a certain familiar point of view one protest or strike looks much like another, irrespective of the immediate issues involved, the prejudices expressed by those involved, and the impact of the protest upon others.

Yet, there are clearly a great many good things expressed in familiar forms of dissent, strikes included. Above, I have indicated that social hope is often one of them. And when I say that social hope is a good way to make sense of what is often expressed in dissent, what is appealed to is an understanding of such hope that is close to the accounts supplied by Havel (1990) and Richard Rorty (1999). On Havel's account, hope is

about a commitment to work for something better, without the prospect of rewards or the conviction that all shall be well or that all manner of things shall be well:

> HOPE in this deep and powerful sense is not the same as joy that things are going well or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for success, but rather an ability to work for something because it is good, not because it stands a chance to succeed.
>
> (Havel 1990: 181–182)

On Rorty's account, with some borrowing from John Dewey, social hope is "the ability to believe that the future will be unspecifiably different from, and unspecifiably freer than, the past" (Rorty 1999: 20). It is also part of an ethical commitment which is, again, not about principles or reducible to principles. Perhaps Havel's account captures a better sense of its motivating role as commitment and not only view, or as a view or moral vision with a commitment built in (views of the world and motivations not easily falling apart from one another). What he says is, again, very close to Gandhi's position in the *Gita* lectures from the 1920s, where he speaks repeatedly about indifference to the fruits of action and the importance of not thinking about political protest simply as a way to get something or to seek a reward (Gandhi 1926). A broader familiarity with the tradition of American pragmatism will suggest that Rorty also had something of this sort in mind. Indeed, Cheryl Misak suggests that a valuing of present activities in the light of future possibilities is a key insight of the pragmatist tradition (2016, 45).

One of the significant features of Rorty's formulation is that it shifts us away from the idea that we may substitute talk about "values" or "fundamental values" for talk about "principles." Social hope is about believing that the future will be different from the past *in unspecified ways*. But this is something that cuts across familiar political lines. It does not take a great deal to have hope of this sort, even if it does take something to act upon it. It is also consistent with the idea that the things valued by most political agents within liberal democracies will be much the same or that they will fall within a series of normal distributions. Some agents may, however, be driven more by fear than by hope, and this may do more to shape actions in differential ways than any deep level at which values differ in wide but orderly ways and align onto divisions of left and right. Gandhi, again, seems to anticipate much of this and considers that we are different waves upon the same sea: "All souls are like waves in water, that is, they are but different forms of that water" (Gandhi 1926: 168). What humans want at their deepest levels is usually much the same, but this is something that we lose sight of because political parties, programs, and traditions can vary considerably. We may also understand why this view was abhorrent to Schmitt, because it posited

a shared humanity rather than differentially constituted political being, shaped by hostility to others as enemies rather than friends. The significance of social hope as an aspiration for the better future of Humanity can also be understood by reflecting upon the slow institutional crisis of social democracy and the way it has been driven by a sense that organizations with a notionally socialist ethos are not looking toward any significantly different society from their opponents. Even revivalist movements of the social democratic left, of the sort that flared up in England when Jeremy Corbyn was elected as leader of the Labour Party, then just as rapidly collapsed with his conclusive defeat in the 2019 General Election, seem to be geared ultimately to adjustments in public spending, shifts in the burden of taxation, and a rebalancing between state and private enterprise. Political agents may, of course, hope for something of that sort. Many of his supporters clearly did. But it is hardly the same thing as social hope in the sense of Havel or Rorty, hope that persists in the face of both advances and retreats and even in the face of political repression.

Marxism is not quite so straightforward on these matters and is in many ways closer to the early days of social democracy. Marx was also not hostile to talk of the human in the way that Schmitt was hostile. (Viewing it as another bourgeois trick.) There was a time when Marxism was a little like Rorty, Gandhi, and Havel. In the early days, a commitment was driven by a sense of social hope, before rival versions had filled out their accounts of what the future was to be like. (Systems of workers' councils, state ownership of the means of production under party control, or under working-class control but still mediated through party control, and so on.) Most of those people we know, who have in recent decades been members of a Communist Party or of a Trotskyist organization, joined groups which were preformed with a more or less definite sense of what they had to do. A generous account will suggest that the early Communist Parties and Trotskyist groupings were not entirely like this, which is not to say that they were a great deal better, but rather that they were different and more of an exploration of something new, without so much of a clear sense of where it might all end. This was something other than dogmatism or dogmatism combined with something else. When I think of my own animal rights advocacy, it seems at times a little like this. I hope for a future which is better for animals, and for domesticated animals, in particular. But I am not at all sure what such a future would look like. And if I sketch outlines for a vegetarian or vegan economy, I am not actually predicting a particular future but engaging in something more like a "proof of concept," showing that there are some ways in which the idea could work at a societal level, even if the ways outlined are never likely to be realized. Other animal rights advocates, who we will encounter later, known as "extinctionists," hope for a future which is a little more clear-cut. A future in which there are no domesticated animals, because they can envisage no other

prospect for a world in which animal rights violations have been ended (Francione 1996). In both cases, our activities are intelligible in the light of these aspirations, in spite of their lack of precision or determinacy. And in spite of any tangible and determinate connection between what we do now and *what we hope for eventually*. My hope is perhaps a little more like Rorty's than the hope entertained by extinctionists. A good deal less determinate about what a future of justice toward other creatures might look like, perhaps because it is also a little more pragmatic, and less inclined toward the shaping of options in line with principles formulated a one point in time, but which must not be violated on other and future occasions even if the non-violation leads us into some very strange and unexpected places.

Social hope, along Havel's and Rorty's lines, is often a driver for habitual participation in dissent, although it can also be absent from dissent or displaced by routine and by political ritual, by a sense of dissent as a way of life rather than a way of getting from where we are to somewhere else. Dissent can then ossify into practices for which we may struggle to offer a plausible explanation. For example, on the East coast of America, in Boston, there is an annual demonstration of Native Americans which has been held every Thanksgiving for almost 50 years. It is a worthy protest, but one which has over time become partly colonized by people such as myself, by the political left. As a result, it is increasingly difficult to separate out from a mass of other demonstrations. It is also smaller than the substantial and more distinctively Indigenous annual ceremony held over in Dakota, which carries a far stronger sense of hope that Native American identity and sovereignty may find ways to continue and perhaps even to flourish in the years to come. We can imagine this annual ceremony continuing after the Boston protest has gone. But not because either will operate as an instrumental means to bring about the change desired, or even because there is a clear idea of what change should be desired or what future a full Indigenous sovereignty might involve. The Dakota ceremony is less of an anticipation of some determinate result than an occasion of mourning for lost futures, an occasion for political grief and grief of other sorts. Yet, the element of hope is there too. Quangel's grief and hope do not exclude one another or not absolutely so. It is tempting to say that there are parties of hope and parties of memory, a formulation from Emmerson which has fed into a long-standing association of the left with one and conservatism with the other. But this too is not quite right, and hope which is separated out from memory, grief, and loss is liable to go badly astray.

Some of the examples used here are also deliberately chosen as causes which have a certain distance from the social democratic left: Native American activism, animal rights advocacy, environmental protest, even if they are causes toward which the left has tended to be sympathetic. And this is partly because hope of the sort that is expressed in dissent,

the kind that has an unclear relation to immediate goals and to means-ends deliberation, does not automatically tell us about where anyone sits on a left-right spectrum. It may give us a clue, of sorts, but it need not conform to Emerson's beautiful but neat division of the world. We cannot, for example, read political principles or fundamental values off of hope and then apply a moral evaluation to the principles or values in order to determine whether or not some particular instance of dissent is worthy of support on the basis of the hopes that it expresses. An emphasis upon the expressive role of dissent need not tempt us to such a process of translation and reduction. There is no useful or even plausible algorithm of the relevant sort. And to say this is not simply to say that hope on the one hand and principles and values on the other are very different things, even if some of the latter may express admirable forms of social hope in more obvious or better ways than other values and principles. Perhaps, it is tempting to say that the left is often better at expressing social hope and sometimes manages to do so through talk about principles, while agents from the political center and the center-right are better at expressing social hope by talking about values and a broader range of ethical concepts bound up with character and integrity. This may be a little more generous than Emerson. Talking about hope is one of the things that progressives of the left are generally good at, even if it has historically tended to be downgraded in favor of narrower talk about political principles, or socialist principles, or trade union principles. Rorty's account of hope is itself like Emerson's, that is, it is progressively aligned. More specifically, it is left aligned, and looks back nostalgically to the hopes of the Trotskyists as part of a discussion of the hope expressing thing that the left in America must become or return to if it is to avoid becoming marginal and eventually despised (Rorty 1999: 255–261). What this presupposes is, of course, a political future in which the distinction of left and right continues to play some meaningful role and that the better future is one in which such a distinction continues to make some sense.

While prejudice is in no way a requirement of alignment with the political right, there is something to Emerson's division. Prejudices on the right have often tended to be more obviously on show than the (also real) prejudices on the left. Notably, racism and gender prejudices associated with various forms of religiously influenced Conservativism, but also hostilities to any reworking of our relations to animals, rooted in pastoral visions and a conception of memory which favors an imagined countryside over the political corruptions of city life. There is also a familiar tendency to think of conservatism and the right as rooted in a deeper philosophical pessimism about humanity. Schmitt certainly rooted his political conservatism in such a view. It carries theological dimensions. But we might scan the history of modern Conservative thought and find much the same thing, from Edmund Burke's skepticism about reason

and political revolution, through Arthur Schopenhauer and his opposition to the democratic nationalist and republican movements of 1848, to 20th- century Conservative thinkers such as Michael Oakshott (who was suspicious of organized politics and party alignment) and Roger Scruton (who embraced both). Here, for example, is Scruton:

> I have no doubt that St Paul was right to recommend faith, hope and love (*agape*) as the virtues that order life to the greater good. But I have no doubt too that hope, detached from faith and untampered by the evidence of history, is a dangerous asset.
>
> (Scruton 2010: 1)

Conservatism of this sort may well tend to revert to Emerson's division, but only to align with fear over hope. Yet, it would be odd to imagine that social hope was the exclusive property of one part of the political spectrum, even if political platforms based upon explicit appeals to hope do still tend to come more from one place than another, and more from the left than from anywhere else.

Faced with the temptations of so simple a contrast, it may be useful to remember that there are also pessimisms of the left just as there are pessimisms of the right. Reinhold Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (1932) was harshly critical of the whole progressive pragmatic liberal tradition where pessimism and hope tend to be a matter of either/or. But it was written from the standpoint of a Christian socialism at the height of Niebuhr's identification with the left (indeed, with the left of the left, as a prominent figure within the militant wing of the Socialist Party of America. At its core is a picture of human fallenness, "the ultimate sources of social conflicts and injustices are to be found in the ignorance and selfishness of men" [Niebuhr 2005: 17]). There is in Niebuhr a basic human tendency to corrupt what is good through a sense of man's self-sufficiency. A tendency which is aggravated through collective organization and collectivist identity rather than solved by it. We do not become good by becoming more collectivist. Nor need we split apart a religious (pessimistic) component of what is going on here from a more secular and more consistently left and progressive (hopeful) component. Sartre's existentialism in *Iron in the Soul* (1949) presents a world which is just as mired and clogged down in fallenness. A world and picture of the human that shares existentialist roots with Schmitt and stresses that alignment is nothing more than self-constituting choice, where ultimately it is all one whether we become a hero of the people, firing at Nazis from a bell tower, or else lie drunk in a cellar. Yet, we do not really doubt that one is to be admired and the other is not. In the text referenced, the heroic character is the one who has been full of doubts, while the Party member who has never given way to such a bourgeois weakness as fear for the future now lies inebriated. A linkage

is drawn between admirable agency and a readiness to embrace doubts, fears, and anxieties. Even to act without the support of hope. Yet, what is admired is not just the capacity to make choices, but to make what look suspiciously like the right choices or at least those most admired on the left. Whether it comes from left or right, an air of pessimism can be present simply in recognition that politics is a domain where things have regularly gone wrong, and catastrophically so. Pessimism can also be, as it is in Sartre, set up against a relentless and overly determinate hope which may benefit from being punctured. Hope has numerous downsides. One downside of the more effective expression of social hope on the left is its masking effect, the tendency for attention to be absorbed by the better and more hopeful part of left aspirations and directed away from prejudice which may continue undisturbed and unnoticed. Exclusive association of social hope primarily with the left by people such as myself can also mask human commonalities in what we want and care for. Scruton's association of Conservatism with pessimism can also come close to resembling a caricature of political alignment which people like myself may seize upon as if it was the whole story.

But it is not the whole story. As a familiar exemplar of admirable social hope from the center-right, we may think of the views of John McCain, the maverick Republican who lost a landslide presidential election to Barak Obama in 2008 after defending Obama from spurious charges on the campaign trail, as a fundamentally decent man with whom he had political disagreements. (Both, curiously, also claimed an influence from Niebuhr.) McCain recognized the historic nature of the moment upon his own loss and the possibility that America might need a moment like this. That it was part of a process which required pathfinding or navigation within which partisanship might find a place but which partisanship should not displace. For both candidates, hope was at the center of the debate. Obama's campaign had repeatedly appealed to hope for a better future (Hobson 2009). So much so that Joe Biden's 2020 campaign struggled for different terminology. It could not unite Americans and simply repeat the Obama narrative. McCain too championed hope and was not afraid to say so, a vision of the US, in words which echoed Aristotle's idea of democracy as the least worst system as "the last best hope of earth" (Gambino 2018). His vision of such hope was curiously well aligned with Rorty's self-confessedly bourgeois liberal, but left inspired, philosophical account, a belief that the future may be better than the past in ways which we cannot specify. In ways which we may often fail to anticipate. In his acceptance speech for the Liberty Medal in 2017, McCain sought to defend a legacy of America's liberal ideals against the recently elected President Trump, whose anti-elite rhetoric was at times curiously close to the anti-bourgeois rhetoric of an earlier time. "I was, knowingly or not, along for the ride as America made the future better than the past" (CNN 2017). McCain need not be seen as typical of hope on the

center-right. In many ways, he was an atypical politician. Even so, the reach and character of his bipartisanship shows that the most effective and striking advocates of social hope do not always come from one side. And when this is the case, it is hard to think of politics in terms of any binary division between friends and enemies, driven by fundamentally differing values or set apart from all constraints of morality or ethics.

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4 Assumptions about Moral Superiority

Let us suppose that we accept something close to the picture set out in the previous chapter. That is to say, we accept that ethics is relevant to political life, in spite of the important role that pragmatism, ends-means deliberation, or consequentialist thinking plays in any sort of practical political engagement. If we accept this much, it may be tempting to then judge the character of political agents by appeal to the views that they hold. As if we could lay down a grid on top of political commitments allowing us to separate out the good people from the bad people. This chapter will present various reasons why we should resist any such temptation. While there are certainly political agents whose views place them beyond the pale, by involving prejudice and associated character flaws, the standing of most political agents cannot so easily be read off of their political commitments. This applies as long as the commitments are of a routine sort, for example, they may believe in social democracy, Christian democracy, liberalism, or conservatism, but not racially driven eugenics, the direct subordination of the state to the will of God, the merits of reviving colonialism, or slavery. The claim is also about ordinary agents rather than elected representatives who form something of a political class in their own right and are subject to special pressures upon moral integrity.

Liberal democracy tends toward a broad overall uniformity of values which form the background to the ongoing sound and fury of party politics. This is not to say that we all end up valuing the same things, but rather that there are multiple overlaps. When regular political entitlements are constrained in some obvious and major ways, for example, by lockdowns and restrictions upon assembly during pandemics, the constraining is noticed, accepted only as temporary, or challenged as illegitimate, and this occurs across differently identifying agents. The relevant freedoms are valued across the main span of the political spectrum, across left, right, and center or from social democrats and liberals through to Conservatives. Self-reporting of positions and values does not always capture this, but can suggest that Conservatives have dark personality traits up to and including psychopathy (Arvan 2013) or they can show liberals and the left to have a much narrower sense of values than Conservatives

DOI: 10.4324/9780429022524-5

(Haidt 2013); but in terms of how we act on a day-to-day basis, the sound and fury over political matters signifies far less than we might imagine. Judging agents by political allegiance is a little like judging them on the basis of the religious ontology that they seem to hold, that is, cluster of supernatural phenomena that their preferred tradition refers to. But it turns out to be a difference that makes no difference. Good people or at least morally average people can believe strange things. We can see this during pandemics, when all manner of odd beliefs can emerge within sufficiently large populations. There may be occasions on which an overly zealous partisan commitment leads a section of a population astray or toward an authoritarianism in which everything is read in line with some fear-driven sense of grievance. Agents may then in large numbers sacrifice character for fidelity to a cause. Beyond such special episodes, when we consider the routine circumstances of liberal democracy, a broad uniformity of values makes any separation out into political sheep and political goats an unworkable procedure *for a large class of cases*. Another way of putting the point would be to say that "we are not better people than most of our political opponents," tempting though it may be to imagine otherwise. There is no strictly deductive and obvious argument which might allow us to arrive at this conclusion. But an overlapping series of considerations may be enough to get us there.

I Images of moral courage

Let us imagine that someone comes out as trans or nonbinary. Let us suppose that they have an academic position and some standing. They are not obscure enough to remain unnoticed. When they go public, there is the possibility that things will go badly wrong. The investment of years of work and relationship building may be lost or hopelessly compromised. Not because people will openly say "I am against this sort of thing," but through the mysterious processes by which ordinary agents reinforce exclusion and prejudice while imagining that they are acting for some entirely unrelated set of reasons. Job offers may dry up. Panel invitations may be fewer. Not to mention the fact that the person has to let their partner know. Their parents, friends, and neighbors will find out too. Yet, they feel not only that this will personally be a better way to live, but that it is something they *ought* to do in the light of the prevailing prejudices. In another time, at some other place, it might remain a private matter. But *here* and *now*, coming out is what should be done. This is their assessment. And it is a plausible one, given that their actions in coming out involve a response to some of the dominant prejudices of our times. Their coming out will involve an element of dissent. It will be a way of speaking the truth to power and saying that "This prejudice must end, and I too have a role in opposing it." Dissent in this form requires moral courage. It is easy to see something admirable and difficult here.

We may wonder about whether or not we would be similarly courageous in similar circumstances. Some of us will eventually face this question as a genuine life choice. The thought experiment sits toward the more realistic end of thought experiments.

Analogies may be drawn between coming out in this way and being a dissident. Analogies which need not be based upon comparable levels of risk, but upon the personal cost of truthfulness. As noted before, dissidents during the Soviet era rallied around the idea of telling the truth in the face of political systems which depended upon a complex set of delusions and falsehoods. The world of liberal democracies can often be like this too, although living in a lie is perhaps less characteristic of ideas about political freedoms and more characteristic of traditional binary assumptions about gender and sexuality and about a low incidence of divergence from the norm. Solzhenitsyn framed matters in these truth-focused terms in the first volume of the *Gulag Archipelago* (1973, translated into English in 1974), suggesting that it was not enough to stand up for the truth, one also had to be ready to sit in jail for it. He pursued the same theme in *Live Not by Lies* (1974), released the day before he was sent into exile. Vaclav Havel forcefully took up the theme, with more of a philosophical inflection, focusing upon being "in the truth" rather than accepting the institutionalized and state sanction lie. The "basic job of 'dissident movements' is to serve truth, that is, to serve the real aims of life," a path that would take dissidents toward the development of parallel structures to those of the state and administration from which they have been excluded (Havel 2018: 112). Those who engage in dissent may or may not experience such exclusion, but those whose dissent extends to becoming dissidents certainly does. Solzhenitsyn and Havel present matters through a claim about character and being. This involves a demanding picture of how to live in the face of abusive power and also a courageous picture. One which helps to give sense to the idea that the virtue of political courage and the very idea of the dissident are closely related. One which also supports the idea that character traits such as truthfulness and courage are often connected to each other. Both conceptually (with one trait explained via talk about other traits) and causally (such that one trait requires others and cannot be in place if they are absent). By focusing upon the issue of truth and commitment to it as *a way to be*, dissidents such as Havel created strong expectations of truth-telling on their own part. By setting expectations in this way, they did not merely revert to a preexisting set of standards, but rather shifted the requirements for truthfulness. They reconstructed what it involved, at least *up to a point*. And they would have failed to be truthful had they failed to live closer to these standards than others, for example, by resorting to conspiracy theories in order to discredit the political regimes that they faced. This is, of course, a temptation which many dissidents eventually fell into. At some points, Solzhenitsyn also seems to have gone

this way with a reversion to antisemitism. Dissidents might also have failed to meet the expectations that they helped to shape if they had simply avoided the telling of inconvenient truths, in the way that those who govern and those who engage in political dissent often do. With protestors rather than dissidents, our expectations of candor are lower. We may hope that they will say something true and important and not utter too many obvious falsehoods along the way. When dissent occurs over issues which involve specialist knowledge, such as climate change, we may expect a good many mistaken claims. Politically convenient targets, such as emissions from flights, may be attributed a greater role than they actually have. Emissions related to activities that protesters themselves engage in routinely (such as meat-eating or driving around in cars) may be downgraded. The science and the data may take a back seat to convenience or to a questionable sourcing of information.

Nonetheless, morally courageous political agency is also possible within liberal democracies, and in current times it is exemplified by a politically shaped decision to come out as nonbinary. However, there seems to be no reason to assume that those who support good causes will also tend to be good agents in any sense that involves an *overall* judgment of their character. Yet, it is tempting to imagine a kind of moral superiority possessed by those who dissent. If we are of the left, then we may think that agents on our side will tend to have better character than agents on the other side. Such a way of seeing matters depends upon a strong binary division of left and right rather than the weaker contrast that I am working with. Something closer to a conception of politics as a continuation of war by other means, complete with enemies who lack the moral standing of our friends. My rejection of this picture stems, in part, from the influence of Simone Weil, whose reflections on the Iliad, written shortly after her experiences as a volunteer in the Spanish Civil War, draw out a level of equal vulnerability and human predicament rather than heroes and villains:

> Nothing precious is scorned, whether or not death is its destiny; everyone's unhappiness is laid bare without dissimulation or disdain; no man is set above or below the condition common to all men; whatever is destroyed is regretted. Victors and vanquished are brought equally near us; under the same head, both are seen as counterparts of the poet, and the listener as well. If there is any difference, it is that the enemy's misfortunes are possibly more sharply felt.
>
> (Weil 1965, 25)

Weil's picture of our predicament in the midst of conflicts has been deeply influential among ethicists who draw from Wittgenstein and who also stress the importance of our common humanity in the face of multiple lines of division (Gaita 2002).

One of the temptations of thinking about politics as a kind of war, with demarcation into friends and enemies, is the temptation to overlay moral inequality onto the conflict and to have no regret about the destruction of others *because of their lesser standing*. This sense of superiority of agents and not simply of political cause draws also upon a degree of forgetfulness about the political center and about political agents who are left on one thing, right on another, and meet in the middle over a third area of political concerns. Even though this may account for the majority of political agents under conditions of liberal democracy. There is something of a minor industry of internet quizzes that will help agents to locate themselves on the political spectrum, in spite of a lack of any great consistency across multiple beliefs. If asked "do agents on the left have better moral character than those on the right," we may suspect that many agents who identify as left would say "yes." But if asked "do agents like yourself have better moral character than agents in the political center," it is not obvious that activists of the left would answer with any uniformly strong conviction. They may not even have an opinion on this prior to being asked about a world beyond that divided into friends and enemies, left and right. Or they may think that anything in between is a sort of swamp of well-meaning but deluded compromisers. Or they may buy into a familiar image of *decency in the center*. This image goes back a long way. Aristotle's *Politics* (IV.11–16) placed the middling sections of society in the role of stabilizers, a corrective against extremes. A special kind of decency is thereby presupposed.

In spite of the attractions of a middle path, I will accept that there are times when there may be an element of truth to the idea of moral superiority on the left. But only an element of truth and only in particular places at particular times. An example would be the 1980s in the UK and the USA, when many politicians on the right were openly advocating a morally repellant outlook, one close to the idea that "greed is good." We may also think of the Trump era and its aftermath in the US, when the Republican Party machine openly embraced a partisan dishonesty and when many on the right hid from their moral responsibilities of truthfulness. The easy conclusion to draw from a spectacle of public dishonesty or even a spectacle of self-serving delusion is that perhaps we do need to think about politics in the terms of friend and enemy rather than a greater multiplicity and that this is the political order of things which must ultimately assert itself. The two examples just cited, the *greed is good* years of the 1980s and the Trump years and their aftermath, both involved shifts to something reprehensible. But during ordinary times, it may be better to think of political agents as down on all fours with each other, even if this applies *only up to a point* and with qualifications. Even so, it is a reasonable description of matters and not an admirable but mistaken kind of political humility. Put simply, it is unlikely that "we" are better than "they" simply on the basis that the causes which "we"

support are better than the causes "they" support. But again, this applies only *up to a point*. It is also worth bearing in mind that the dubious presupposition of moral superiority may be reversed to show that agents of the right have a special inbuilt moral compass which is lacking in the case of everyone else. If presuppositions of left superiority fall because of a default level of moral equality, presuppositions of right superiority also fall.

The regular patterns of political activity on social media may go some way toward convincing us that alignment and virtue do not necessarily coincide. All the available prejudices seem to tumble out from all the available directions. So much so that it is hard to look at online posts from activists without seeing obvious cases of political agents committing the same faults that they criticize or enjoying the sufferings of others. Not the sufferings of monsters or dictators, but of merely awkward or unpleasant political figures who have done various wrongs, the greatest of which is belonging to the wrong political party or advancing the wrong set of views. As a familiar and regularly commented upon example, we might think of supporters of traditional social democratic conceptions of the left who will post and repost almost anything which happens to be hostile to Israel without any particular regard for truth and sources. Ordinary state wrongs are magnified into special wrongs. Or we may think about the response of some online vegans to the suicide of the television chef Anthony Bourdain in 2018, following his many years of depression, based upon two decades of targeting for a throw away comment in a New Yorker essay whose remit was to be controversial. Bourdain had met the remit by unfairly comparing vegans to the Hezbollah. Nineteen years later, the quote was still the basis for levels of hostility that provoked growing levels of unease across the vegan community (Colb 2018). *A sense that* something had gone badly wrong. A discrepancy between the claim upon compassion built into veganism and the reality of a radical lack of compassion for others.

We may, of course, become disinhibited online in ways that do not apply across life as a whole. The medium may shape and help to construct the message and its hostile content. Technology does not operate as a neutral tool which disseminates preformed ideas. Rather, it helps to shape the ideas disseminated. Yet, no one compels us to say offensive things, and if someone were to say that "The internet made me do it!" they would be attempting to hide the truth or to hide from the truth. Ultimately, we behave badly online, up to and including offence, cyberbullying, and harassment, because this is part of who we are. Whether or not we want to think of ourselves as human, or post-human, or something else, we live in an age when online agency is an important part of all political agencies and an important part of who we ourselves are. And when we look at such activity, we will find that offensive behavior does not map easily onto political commitments, such that there is some clear pattern of better behavior on the left and worse behavior on the

right. Localized forms of indifference to the truth are present across the political spectrum. In a context of this sort, where there is no shortage of people who will seize upon falsehoods by political opponents, the difficult thing may be to challenge them when uttered by those with whom we have causes in common. And that too involves a kind of moral courage, albeit the stakes and hazards are less for dissidents or for agents who come out openly and accept the vulnerability of a publicly known but socially disadvantageous gender identity or sexuality.

II Character and alignment

My concern in levelling the playing field, so that we think of agents as sharing much the same moral standing, is not only about our personal weaknesses as individuals. It also concerns the way in which support for justice and the best available causes tends to be mixed with prejudice in ways that cannot easily be separated. The politics of gender is an illustration of the point. Left protest has traditionally been male oriented and somewhat misogynistic. Echoes of this have carried on from social democracy into more future-oriented causes such as animal rights advocacy. Activist groups as well as the incidence of veganism and vegetarianism tend to be predominantly female but with a disproportionate male influence at the top and with tendencies toward reinforcement of traditional gender roles and inequalities. It has inherited some of social democracy's unease about sexual matters, even to the point of a kind of puritanism. So, for example, sexualized "shockvertising" by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) involving partial nudity has repeatedly been banned from the Super Bowl, criticized by religious leaders, and banned from in-flight magazines (Heilpern 2016). But it has also drawn strong criticism from many animal rights advocates, notionally because the sexualized images have tended to be images of women. Yet, such criticism has never been along the lines of asking for a multiplicity of genders. Rather, it has reproduced familiar appeals to the wrongness of pornography by agents who almost certainly use pornography. (Unless there is something very odd about vegans as a group of relatively young, relatively affluent, and usually white political agents with a good deal of free time and access to the internet.) Criticism of sexualized advertising is not shaped by debate about how to meet the practical requirements of gender inclusivity, but rather by a thought that the cause of animal rights *should not go there*.

Sexual puritanism remains an important part of the makeup of the traditional left, even if there are countercurrents. We can see this not only in familiar left attitudes toward pornography but also in the form of unease about gender fluidity when the latter conflicts with established traditions within feminism. The feminist discourse that emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s largely framed pornography as a means of controlling women. In the case of influential figures such as Catherine Mackinnon,

the position became more entrenched over time, with viewers of routine pornography involving consensual acts that almost all adult agents have themselves consensually engaged in, being accused of complicity in rape, child systems of trafficking, and prostitution. "Consuming pornography is an experience of bought sex, of sexually using a woman or a girl or a boy as an object who has been purchased" (Mackinnon 2005: 999). The ambiguities of sexual representation, their overlapping influences of gender inequalities and resistance to sexual conformity, seem to be missing from a picture which holds up poorly when we confront actual trafficking for sex and actual child abuse rather than the idea that visual representations of humans engaging in intercourse must somehow lead to some of the worst things that humans are capable of. Production of pornography has certainly been shaped by oppressive gender roles and has tended to be for a predominantly male and notionally heterosexual audience. But moving from considerations of this sort to a general anti-pornography stance and failing to recognize the transformation that technology could bring about in participation, dissemination, and the proliferation of multiple gender conceptions has resulted in a discourse which has periodically coalesced with the Conservative right's promotion of family values and hostility to public sexuality. The generation of feminist and queer theorists who have come after, people like Judith Butler, have often critiqued both the anti-sex agenda and the subordination of views about sexuality to state power on the one hand and the masculine-oriented political theories of the left on the other. "With the recent media success of anti-pornography feminists, and the veritable identification of feminism with a MacKinnon-style agenda, feminism has become identified with state-allied regulatory power over sexuality" (Butler 1994: 12).

The influence of a sexual puritanism upon the left is still present, and can be seen in the ongoing attempts to paint a radical veneer onto hostility to transgender equality by appealing to a transgender threat to "real" women. Again, extremity of charge is used as a deterrent, with the feminist scholar Sheila Jeffreys claiming in 2008 that "transexualism might more reasonably be seen as a violation of human rights and should certainly not be uncritically accepted as a socially transformative force equivalent to gay liberation" (Jeffreys 2008: 56). Such moves open up pathways to continuity of prejudice and promiscuous forms of left-right cooperation. But the targeting does not seem to be only directed toward transgender agents. Rather, it is directed at attempts to shift the entire left and feminist discourse on sexuality away from the norms of the postwar era and the mirroring norms of the 1970s rebellion against the latter which accommodated a good deal of the same understanding of gender roles and the family, opening the family to same-sex parenting rather than anything more subversive. By contrast, works such as Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (first published in 1990) present a disruptively different conception

of feminism and of human beings as more performative, and capable of change in forms other than ideological transformation. For Butler, "there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires" (Butler 2006: 190). Gender is about performance. It is not a settled fact.

One way or another, the historic puritan roots of a good deal of traditional left identity in Western Europe and North America still make their way through in the form of multiple forms of unease about physicality, the body, and any uncontrolled spillage of human sexuality into the public domain. It is tempting to say that attitudes associated with a socially conservative set of values (often family values) have migrated to the left. But perhaps they have always been there, together with actual lineal connections to residual traditions of puritanism in countries with something of a white Anglo-Saxon and Protestant identity. Anne Applebaum, who has written often about this problem on the populist right and about the dissident experience during the Soviet era, has identified a worrying censoriousness at work within the academy and within civil society at large. The target of what Applebaum calls "The New Puritans" is not just some real or imagined political enemy, but the idiosyncratic or unconventional, anyone a little "off," or who fails to read the mood of the room. "Some have made egregious errors of judgement. Some have done nothing at all. It is not always easy to tell" (Applebaum 2021). It is generative of the atmosphere in which simple and obvious things become hard to say, an atmosphere in which truthfulness is easily compromised. My own interest in the concept of puritanism stems from Iris Murdoch, who uses the term in ways that link oversimplifying intellectual trends within liberal thought and in our understanding of the concept of truthfulness with a resistance to sexual multiplicity and with the many often repressed and suppressed ways of being human (Milligan 2014).

Part of the oddity of a good deal of contemporary activism on the left is that while the parties and groups aspiring to become parties have declined, party line and a fear of uttering heresies against it seem almost to have grown and spread. Seen in the light of such pressures and with an understanding of the long conflict which has been raging within feminist circles over this issue, we may readily understand why a vegan political agent might guiltily consume their preferred kinds of pornography in private while publicly following the proper and far safer line of criticizing the use of sexual imagery in vegan advertising. However, it is difficult to see how this could be morally courageous or a way of living "in the truth" in anything like the sense set out by Havel. The acuteness of the conflict is, however, greater than with those whose focus is upon traditional left causes because of the nature of the issues involved in vegan campaigning, that is, *its focus upon the physicality of harms inflicted upon bodies, the treatment of beings as meat, and the difficulties that humans have in fully acknowledging the physicality that connects us to other creatures*. Vegan

shockvertising emerges out of a confrontation of our physicality. Nakedness occurs in vegan protests, in public squares where human meatiness is presented as analogous to the meat of nonhumans. Fake blood and occasional real blood too is used to emphasize the point. In the final days of the writing of this text, animal rights activist Tash Peterson paraded around a Luis Vuitton store in Perth, Australia, wearing only a G-string and what she claimed was her own menstrual blood. "Louis Vuitton have blood on their hands, and so do you if you're not vegan" (Rolfe 2021). This too looks like moral courage, and courage which involves both breaks from the shaming of women for their physicality and a break from the connection between traditional left patterns of dissent and the internalization of oppressive attitudes toward female sexuality. Yet, the courage is not in the message but in the medium, in the way that it is presented. Or perhaps these two do not fall apart. The veganism *per se* is not courageous. Nor is the particular kind of veganism that involves a harsh judgment upon others. Coming out as a vegan is hardly challenging in the way that coming out as nonbinary is challenging or terrifying. Advocating veganism *in this disturbing way* is the thing that involves courage.

Most of us are not like this. Nor should we expect too great a similarity between those who dissent within liberal democracy and dissidents. An attribution of an admirable courage is built into the ways in which the concept of dissident is ordinarily used. We regard dissidents as admirable, until we learn otherwise. When we speak of agents as protestors or as engaging in dissent, there is no obvious and parallel commitment. As we might expect, there are special exceptions. Agents who come out as nonbinary do seem to exhibit moral courage and a difficult move toward living "in the truth," even when the truth will bring a great deal of personal trouble. Agents like these are among our best contemporary exemplars for moral courage in political contexts. But the linkage of courage or admirable character and dissent does not seem to spread over the broader field of dissent. There is nothing to guide us one way or another as to whether someone who engages in protest over animals, or the environment, or health service cuts might be admirable or disreputable, beyond the sheer fact that they support something good. (On the assumption that *the protests in question involve a good cause*.) The point here is not a denial of familiar political flaws and prejudices on the right. Those are all too evident. Rather, it involves a recognition that "we are often like this too." Indeed, the sense of moral superiority draws mainly from looking at opponents rather than ourselves. When we look at others, political disagreement makes ordinary human flaws easier to spot.

III Personal virtue

Acceptance that ethics is relevant across political life as a whole does not entail that it functions in exactly the same way everywhere. Statecraft

is different from making a point on the streets, coming out as trans, or arguing with colleagues about what is and is not racist. In line with the modest particularism embraced at the start of this text, I am certainly not going to argue for a uniformity in political ethics that relies upon some decontextualized set of principles about truthfulness, the use of political force, or the five or six most important character requirements for good citizens and political representatives. Ethical deliberation that deals with parties and politicians cannot be too doctrinaire, and a good deal of deliberation takes the simpler form of consequentialist reasoning about public well-being.

The opposite can be true of dissent among ordinary political agents who hold no special position in parties of the state. There has always been a role for intransigent and utopian radicalisms, for agents who reject compromise and embrace unrealizable plans. By which, I do not mean plans which fail, but plans which are set to fail from the start. Gandhi is an obvious example of this kind of agent with an unrealizable goal. Independence for India was winnable, but *swaraj* in the sense of a broader national spiritual awakening was not. Neither was his model of semi-direct democracy based upon small panchayat village councils ever likely to be the bedrock of Indian political life (Milligan 2016). These plans were inspiring but contained strong utopian elements. Gandhi was aware of the gap between his aspirations and the political realities. Agents with unrealizable plans can sometimes play a constructive role, for example, animal rights advocates who call for full political equality for animals; or activists within small groupings who want democracy to be based upon workers' councils; or eco-activists who want a restructuring of technologically entrenched economies around agrarian egalitarianism. Utopian activisms of this sort are very far from the consequentialist reasoning involved in statecraft.

However, the privileged role of consequentialist reasoning in state-level politics also does not mean that it can operate on its own, apart from other ethical considerations such as rights, duties, and whether or not the minimal expected standards of public life are upheld. Sometimes, such public standards can be more important than immediate questions of policy, especially when a public figure (elected or not) threatens to override political safeguards or threatens to spread their own personal character flaws out in all directions. This was notoriously a concern about the Trump administration in the US between 2017 and 2021. The dominant charges levelled at the President were *not* focused upon particular acts alone, but upon a pattern of actions which gave cause for concern about the President's character. The charges went beyond the usual political slights and accusations thrown by one side in political conflicts against the leaders of the other side. We might, of course, regard this concern with the character of the President as a long-sighted consequentialism. A worry about how he might respond in the case of some great

national emergency. But often, it was rationalized instead as a concern that he was bringing the office of the presidency into disrepute. An odd charge to make in the case of agents who may never have held the office in particularly high regard, but rather as a prize secured only by members of a wealthy elite. Even so, people with different background positions converged upon the idea that the head of state was unfit for office, a person of poor moral character.

Criticism along these lines, by appeal to moral character, is something that those on the political right or those who approach matters from a special religious background (e.g., some Protestant evangelicals or anti-racist ministers rooted in the civil rights tradition) have often been more comfortable with than those on the left. However, there is a doubling of left thought on such matters, a simultaneous reluctance to move onto the ground of claims about high and low moral character, alongside the presupposition that left leaning agents are better people than their opponents. One driver behind reluctance to make character claims is a concern about moralism, expectations of conformity, and the reinforcement of dominant moral standards. These do not form easy ground for the left to stand upon, especially a left which has often been more comfortable with charges of corruption than with the articulation of any actual standards of moral probity. Churches and ministers speak of good moral character; political activists of the left rarely do so, unless they also happen to draw upon such religious traditions.

For the sake of clarity, by "character" I mean what is usually meant and what has been spoken of in discussions of virtue since Plato and Aristotle. The idea may partly be captured by talk about stable sets of dispositions and desires. Character is composed, to a large extent, of *dispositions to act, to respond, and to see the world in one way rather than another.* The moral vision of agents of good character is not overwhelmed by egocentricity, nor are their actions impetuous. Rather, they display practical wisdom of a familiar sort. Familiar, because we all know agents who overreact and agents who respond in more measured ways. In the classic language of the virtues, the virtuous agent is someone who has stable dispositions to feel and to respond in the right way, at the right time, to the right degree, with respect to the right objects, and for the right reasons. Figuratively, and in some respects literally, they see the world in a different and better way. They tend to want more admirable things, for example, the well-being of others, even if such things come only at the expense of opportunities to advance their own personal wealth and power. Allowances are made in this formulation for the possibility that some desires may not involve dispositions, but longings of some other sort to which no action may be relevant (Strawson 2009).

As a further qualification, character traits only function as virtues if they operate in particular ways. We need not deny that those who fight for terrible causes are often courageous. People such as Confederate soldiers

and Reinhard Heydrich would be obvious stock examples. Heydrich flew just under 100 missions, was shot down, and escaped through enemy lines. Nonetheless, he could easily make it onto a list of the ten worse people of the 20th century, settling snugly alongside Hitler and some others. In the case of such terrible but courageous agents, their courage can make their agency worse than it would otherwise be, because it allows them to bring about more dreadful things. Courageous Nazis can be worse than cowardly Nazis, courageous racists can be worse than racists who lack the courage to uphold their regrettable convictions. In all such cases, the character trait of courage does not function as a virtue. One way to press this distinction, between a trait functioning as a virtue and failing to do so, is the *eudaemonist* option of linking the trait to *living and faring well* or to *the good life*. On such an approach, traits must tend to promote a good life or personal well-being in order to function in the right way. However, this is rooted in a very Aristotelian account of virtue and character, an approach which can make it difficult to accommodate sacrificial virtues and the idea that virtuous agents are often disposed to act in ways which are clearly *not* in their own best interests. When we apply this point in the context of dissent, the example of dissidents is again useful: some dissidents may have enjoyed good lives which were also lives of sacrifice, but many have simply suffered with no prospect of reward for their efforts. It would be odd to say that such self-sacrificial agents could not be virtuous, and odder still to moralize the idea of a good life to the point where they enjoyed good lives (in the rounded sense of desirable lives) irrespective of their suffering.

An alternative to indexing virtue to *eudaimonia* is to appeal to a more *aretaic* account in which virtues are simply excellences of character. Such excellence may be accounted for in several different ways. We might say that the character traits in question tend toward the well-being of others, or toward liberality, or that they are admirable in their own right (which might allow for courageous Nazis to have at least one virtue), or that they are admirable *as part of the life of the particular agent*. (In which case, again, we might have courageous Nazis, but no virtuous Nazis.) My own sympathies here are with a mixed or disjunctive approach in which there are several different ways that a trait may function as a virtue. Being admirable in its own right, *without appeal to contextual factors*, is not one of them. There are at least two good reasons why we ought to reject any such decontextualized understanding of virtue. The first is that the virtues are ordinarily thought of as in some sense unitary. We cannot have just one of them. If this view is correct (and it has had many prominent supporters since Plato), then we ought to think of virtue in the round or overall. In which case, a courageous robber of the sort who appears in romantic literature, or a fearless villain, or an architect of the Holocaust such as Reinhard Heydrich (whose assassination was successful in part because he stood bravely to face his attackers) may have a genuine kind

of courage, but courage of a sort that will never function as a virtue. By contrast, the courage of those who come out as trans, given all the vulnerabilities this involves in the context of societies still strongly marked by multiple forms of gender bias and sexual puritanism, looks like a good candidate for the kind of courage that operates as a virtue. They may not be "better people," overall. However, their moral courage seems to be a strength and a virtue.

The second reason why we should reject any decontextualized understanding of what makes a character trait a virtue flows out of an often unnoticed aspect of the distinction between virtues on the one hand and how they function on the other. Once we have made this distinction, it becomes much harder to think of virtues in a strictly internalist way, that is, as set by what is inside of us irrespective of other worldly circumstances. We might call such strict internalism "the Stoic view," given that a number of prominent stoics such as Seneca believed that our virtue is entirely untouchable or invulnerable. The approach here points instead toward at least some external requirements for virtue. An illustrative example is loyalty to a political party, cause, or person. If the cause or party has gone bad or if the person makes it impossible for the relationship to be one of equals (perhaps through some very old-fashioned ideas about gender roles), then loyalty to them cannot function as a virtue. Our virtues in this way do not depend only upon ourselves. They also depend upon others and our relation to them. This is a less egocentric conception of *what virtues are*. A useful corollary to this conception of virtue is that it is particularly effective at avoiding familiar criticisms of the very idea of character (Alfano 2013). The basis for such character skepticism is an idea drawn from psychology, which we tend to make a fundamental attribution error when explaining how agents act. We appeal to inner traits rather than the situations that agents are in. Trivially, action is the outcome of both. So there is an element of truth in these critiques. However, the approach taken here does justice to this point by rejecting a strictly internal conception of virtues and insisting that an appeal to virtues works best as an appeal to *character traits in a larger and relational context*.

As a clarification of the above comments, consider truthfulness. This is often thought of as a virtue of political agents, and failures of truthfulness have been the focus of multiple critiques (Koyré 1945; Arendt 1972, 2006; Derrida 2002). Truthfulness is a virtue which has an important place within political life. It interconnects with other political virtues. Indeed, it is difficult to make sense of any other character trait functioning as a virtue in the absence of some kind of agent truthfulness. We expect a certain level of truthfulness from good political agents. And it seems reasonable to hold that this requirement extends across the whole of political life. Accordingly, we can and should evaluate the truthfulness of activists and protesters, just as we can and should evaluate the

truthfulness of career politicians. But this does not mean that exactly the same norms of truthfulness apply in both cases. And it does not mean that either case can be reduced to the following of some simple rule or principle such as "always tell the truth." If any such principle was adhered to, it would lead to many additional problems and possibly to an unworkable state of affairs. We are not, after all, psychologically equipped to tell the truth about all failings and flaws every day and every moment of our lives when we are with friends, neighbors, and those we love. Beyond a certain point, honesty about who and what we are and what others may happen to be would become unbearable. Instead of such an impossible and wounding practice of truth-telling, truthfulness is more to do with expectations of candor. And these are partly local, specific to practices, and varying with culture. We would not expect a television presenter to say to a young person, "We could both stand to lose a few pounds." It would be dreadfully hurtful for them to say such a thing. But curiously, it might be less surprising to hear the Dalai Lama say this. Or at least, we might be less surprised if we understand how practices of truth-telling and the special license of lamas to say things that others may not operate within traditional Tibetan culture.

Expectations of candor are not at all the same in party politics and in political dissent, and in our personal lives such expectations are often internal to the relationships that we form with others. For example, when someone asks about their appearance, they are often seeking reassurance and not information. And knowing when this is the case is part of the 1,000 small things that make relationships work. There are different ways of telling the truth, and questions concerning which truths ought to be spoken at which points in time. We can tell the truth in ways that are geared to inform, but we can also do so in ways which are geared to harm, to mislead, or to direct attention away from where it belongs. When a celebrant at a marriage asks, "does anyone object to the union of these two individuals," it is not a good moment to shout out, "I have just heard that your dog is dead" or "Your brother had sex with the best man, while I was left to organize the reception." These things may be true, but there are moments more suited for saying them.

The truth in state-level politics and in political dissent can be like this too. When truths ought to be told remains situationally sensitive. In September 2002, the UK public was informed that Saddam Hussein was ready to deploy weapons of mass destruction within 45 minutes. The truth about the time factor for certain kinds of weapons was told, but not enough of the truth was told to allow the public to understand that these were not actually nuclear weapons or anything likely to devastate cities. The level of immediate threat was distorted. The moral of this story is that how the truth is told, how much of it is told, and when it is told are all part of the complex moral accomplishment of truthfulness. These are context sensitive matters, but the contexts of dissent and of

state-level politics are not quite the same. There are times when political figures have a responsibility to tell unpopular truths. And the responsibility to do so may be greater than that of other agents. Here, we may think again of the Trump era, and the moral responsibility of prominent Republicans to take a stand and to say what they knew to be true about the presidential behavior, about the emerging pandemic, and about the growing likelihood of mass death as the COVID-19 body count began to climb. The main failure of truthfulness occurred at the top. But this is not always the case. There is no golden rule which says that the greatest failures of truthfulness must occur in one place rather than another, at the top rather than the bottom, or on the right rather than on the left. Political movements of any sort can inherit beliefs, obsessions, and practices which bear little relation to current realities, and they may persist in promoting them against all good sense and in ways that deliberately mislead and distort.

Here, when I refer to having a grasp of expectations of candor as an aspect of the virtue of truthfulness, I am not referring to a grasp of something fixed and unchanging. Expectations can also be shifted by those who engage in dissent; this can impact upon truthfulness, changing what it involves. Accordingly, it seems unlikely that there is a single set of norms for truthfulness within all kinds of dissent. It would be surprising if there were.

IV Good causes and good character

This chapter began with a simple idea: that there is no plausible reason for agents on the left (however understood) to assume that they (in my case "we") are *better people* than agents on the right simply by virtue of their general political alignment. Our causes may often be just, and at least some of our many visions of how to organize the world may be preferable to those of political opponents; but none of this makes us better people in a sense which involves some general superiority of our character. Of course, an imaginary comprehensive account book of the character of all agents (let us call it St. Peter's political log) might happen to show more virtue among left agents than among those of the right as a sheer contingent brute fact about how virtue is distributed. But that is a rather different thought from the one at stake here, that is, there is some manner of regular, overall, constitutive, or causal connection between left political commitment and personal virtue. Nor should we really expect this to be the case, given that left identity is much more elusive than it might have seemed to be in the 20th century.

When the veteran Italian left sympathizing philosopher Norberto Bobbio wrote *Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction* (1994, translated into English 1996), he was well aware of a long tradition of political crossovers and the blurring of alignment. Nonetheless,

he was able to confidently claim that "there is a very clear distinction between the right and the left, for which the ideal of equality has always been the pole star that guides it" (Bobbio 1996: 82). The Italian context also strongly favored a retention of the distinction as a way of marking of the moral indefensibility of fascism and the recurring attempts by the Italian right to draw positives from its legacy. At that point in time, it was still easy to believe that a clear blue stretch of water separated out left identity and right identity, and did so on an international scale. Not simply on the basis of a rejection of fascism, but with left political identity based upon the eradication of social inequality and the right committed to inequality rooted in nature. Fascism remains intolerable, but the rest of the picture has become more complex. It is hard to view matters in Bobbio's way now, as conceptions of equality and of *kinds of equality* have proliferated. The restriction of income differentials hardly captures the range of things at stake across gender equality, the equality of nations, religious equalities, equality of opportunity, and of political entitlements associated with citizenship or our shared humanity. All of which are complex, qualified, and occasional in competition with each other. Once we move beyond a very rudimentary conception of what kinds of equality matter most, there is no real agreement among those who identify as left, or among those who identity as on the right, or in the political center. When we drill down into what is common to the left and only to the left, very little remains. And none of it turns out to be as clear-cut as Bobbio was still in a good position to believe, prior to the populist wave at the start of the present century, prior to the crisis within social democracy, and prior to much of the advance of Green politics. If we regard left identity as largely a matter of negative partisanship (opposing various things) and identification with overlapping sets of history and traditions, then its cohesiveness as a pathway to any sort of judgment about good character may seem less obvious to us than it was to earlier left-identifying generations of activists.

To say this is to accept that there are perfectly plausible ways of making sense of what it is to belong to the political right which we might reject, but which do not involve anything that is inherently offensive or prejudicial toward others. An agent might, for example, simply hold to various views about the social advantages of the free market. They might reflect upon the important fact that market economies have dramatically increased inequality while resulting in a more significant and global reduction of poverty. A fact which for people on the left like myself is perplexing but true. Market economies have accomplished this through systems which generate winners and losers. Some of those who have lost have done so in terrible ways. The benefits have also remained partly invisible in already affluent countries, but the overall balance sheet of market economies has a bottom line which has been positive *on a global scale*. Unjust, but positive over poverty eradication. We can readily

understand why someone might hold that *this is the best available way to do things*, and the belief would in no way indicate a lack of compassion or concern about anything that humans ordinarily value. Again, it is possible for us to accept this without actually agreeing with the political position in question. Or a political agent might believe in the importance of roots for identity and human happiness, or in the risks of rapid political change, or they might have views about the prospects of different political parties for making the world a better or worse place. They might reflect upon the relative performance of parties of the left and right in office and find the comparison unfavorable to the former. This would be a contestable conclusion, but not necessarily an unreasonable one or one that would have to be based upon any failure of honesty. Given that parties of the left and the right tend to take up office under different economic circumstances, direct comparison of performance is difficult and there may be no value neutral way of carrying it out. Rather than a lack of truthfulness, appraisal of right alignment as best might merely be disappointing but honestly made and with malice to none. Most people who support parties of the right within liberal democracies may well be like this. Such people are all around us as doctors, nurses, teachers, colleagues, and friends.

None of this requires that we reject the view that there *can* be significant differences of character between political agents or doubts about appealing to character differences of any sort in order to explain bad actions or personal failings. The appeal here is not to a form of character skepticism. It is simply a presupposition that there is probably a normal distribution of character traits across the main body of ordinary politically committed agents and that, with some qualifications, character does not map at all well onto their alignment. If we think of a series of normal distributions for virtue, the distributions for those identifying as left, center, and right may well be broadly similar. They may not map onto each other exactly or center at exactly the same point, but over time the distributions will shape-shift and move closer and further away; the results might be surprising.

The few special cases in which agents on the left do tend in some reliable way to be better people in some overall sense concern exceptional accomplishment and exceptional failure. Some agents who protest, engage in dissent, and dedicate their lives to a great cause may not merely be good political agents, but closer to what we might figuratively call "political saints." They share the courage that we attribute as default to dissidents without becoming consumed by hostility to regimes. It is, however, easier to think of examples of such people from outside liberal democracies. Here, I am thinking of Nelson Mandela, or rather the version of Nelson Mandela who came out of prison after 27 years and called upon his supporters to "Take your guns, your knives and your pangas, and throw them into the sea!" (Mandela 2004: 690). Gandhi too springs to mind,

and within the heavily compromised liberal democracy of the post Second World War American South, so too does Martin Luther King. We need not be blind to their many personal failings. Gandhi was a terrible parent and a hopeless teacher of the young at his ashram. Martin Luther King shared some of the less celebration-worthy values of the 1950s, particularly in relation to gender and women. If we want to work with a category of "political saints," their saintliness will be figurative and not the saintliness of actual "moral saints" (if any such people really exist rather than being the constructs of great literature). Even so, agents of an exceptional sort do seem to emerge out of left-influenced protest and only out of such protest. Or, out of the kinds of protests that the left claim more vocally than anyone else.

Matters do become more complicated when we start to notice that certain iconic causes could equally well be claimed by the right as by the left. Lincoln was a Republican in a sense that spanned multiple meanings. Tolstoy, the most prominent opponent of war in his day, was a religious mystic. And the Dalai Lama would no doubt be uneasy about the idea that he is on any side other than that of humanity and all sentient beings; yet, he too is a political agent, and an accomplished one. In the case of some such agents, whose beliefs do not fit easily into our conceptions of the main lines of political division, the left may perhaps have a plausible claim of connection, but there are respects in which all have claim.

Comparisons with agents who fall dramatically short of regular moral standards may also be made. And often, these will be agents who we identify as being on the right. Agents whose character has been shaped by an active and overt racism or by some other manner of prejudice which is acted out clearly, forcefully, and violently. Agents who, no matter what they say, do not seem to value the best features of liberal democracy, but to reject them. There is an obvious sense in which the political commitments of such agents may be said to corrupt their character. Not because they become cartoon villains, but because any otherwise admirable character traits will no longer function as virtues but will instead tend to make them into worse people than they might otherwise be. They will become people capable of dreadful things, and not simply in the way that we are all capable of dreadful things. But rather, they are primed for them. And so, I am certainly not arguing that politics and character are entirely independent of one another, as if one might hold and act upon the views of Hitler, Stalin, or Jefferson Davis and Adolf Eichmann while being just as decent a person as anyone else. When one gets into the slavery and mass confinement and death business, there is little point in reading Kant in order to make things right. There are clearly agents with special moral flaws and agents whose ordinary flaws make a great play when they happen to wield power. However, the more regular relationship between character and alignment is not so clear-cut. Not so straightforward as it is in the myth of moral superiority. Typical agents

on the left are more admirable than the worst political figures on the right, but so too are typical agents on the right, just so long as they lack any special high level of character reshaping prejudice.

To reinforce the point, and why it should be accepted by those such as myself who are left-aligned, it may be useful to return to reflection upon some of the more obvious ethical failings of my side, that is, the left. And more specifically, the attitudes which we may take to have an especially close connection to character flaws, because they make it difficult for other traits to function as virtues. There are some obvious cases of such attitudes. For example, the legacy of idealizing blue collar and conspicuously male trade unionists, who are seen as the originating force for social democracy. There is something of a recognized toxic legacy on this matter. For example, the Labour Party in the UK has been the main focal point of the left for more than a century. In two of the four UK nations (England and Wales) this continues to be the case at the time of writing. Indeed, if we were to suspend the idea that the social democratic parties that flourished in the 20th century were not *of the left*, then our concept of what is left and what is on the right might easily become unmoored. Yet, throughout all of its history, this important exemplar of what is left rather than right has had a demonstrable reluctance to choose female leaders, especially for the top job. A reluctance that seems to stem both from membership and party machine.

For example, when Sir Keir Starmer took over the role in 2020, he was the latest male leader of the Labour Party to defy a recurring consensus across much of the party machine that the next leader should be a woman. At the time of writing, Labour's main competitor, the Conservative Party, has had two female leaders who have also been Prime Ministers of the UK; the Liberal Democrats went into the 2019 General Election with a female leader; the Scottish National Party has had a female First Minister in Scotland for several years; the Green Party has usually had a female leader working in combination with a male leader; Plaid Cymru, the party of Welsh independence aligned to the Scottish National Party, had a female leader for several years; and the main Protestant party in Northern Ireland, the Democratic Unionist Party, has had a female First Minister and (at the time of writing) the main Catholic party, Sinn Fein, currently has a female leader. Out of a total of 21 Prime Ministers and First Ministers of the smaller nations of the UK, between the devolution of power in 1997 and 2021, 11 have belonged to the Labour Party. All of them men. Out of the remaining ten from the other parties, four have been women. In the case of three First Ministers of Northern Ireland, there was no election; they were appointed from Westminster by a Labour Government. None were women. Labour has briefly had two female leaders in Scotland, but only under circumstances where neither stood a reasonable chance of winning an election. To their credit, the

problem is one that Labour has been aware of for some time and has tried to address at multiple levels – successfully at constituency and national executive committee level, but without bringing a woman candidate close to challenging for the top job. Unless gender is set aside, this does seem like a poor basis from which to make large assumptions about a default moral superiority.

A little further away from social democracy, environmental activism has periodically lurched toward misanthropy and authoritarianism. The animal rights movement (of which I am part) arguably has an emerging problem with the cyberbullying of opponents and of whoever embraces animal advocacy, but does so in a way which conflicts with someone's preferred theory about how animals might be liberated or their property status abolished. A language permeated by imagery of a fight against animal slavery is deployed, in spite of the overwhelmingly white composition of the movement. Other terrible analogies are also deployed, between the treatment of animals on the one hand and the Holocaust on the other. And here, I stress that it is within my movement that these things occur. Both analogies involve temptations toward soft forms of racism or soft forms of Holocaust denial. A covering over of the horrors of actual slavery and the actual Holocaust. Here, I am not seeking to deny the terribleness of what is done to animals, but merely to point out that they are terrible in a way which is utterly different from either slavery or the Holocaust, and that attempts to elide over the difference comes at a high risk of downplaying the historic wrongs inflicted upon those who are not white, gentile, and comparatively privileged in the way that I am and that most other animal advocates are. Dietary practice, like left alignment, is a poor basis for character judgment.

When it comes to prejudice, and prejudice of a sort which may help to shape a more plausible appraisal of character, there is no shortage of flaws on the part of agents such as myself, who identify as being *of the left*. And, again, this is *not* a critique of left alignment, but a point about understanding its limitations and what it does and does not involve. It does not characteristically involve being a better person than anyone else, including political opponents (with some exceptions). That is, as indicated, a myth and a myth that can block pathways to the recognition of shared human flaws and vulnerabilities. It can be a barrier to the emergence of political compassion of a sort which can be vital to moving matters forwards. So, let me rephrase the point about the relationship between political alignment and character. I will assume that setting aside exemplary agents and the organized promoters of prejudice at the extremes of politics (agents whose character is often shaped by far-right ideas or by far-right/far-left fusions), our default assumption should place political agents on a par with one another with regard to their ethical standing or, more simply, with regard to their moral character.

V A brief summary

If the above is correct, then the idea that support for good causes implies good character is a mistake. But it would also be a mistake to run the same sort of argument backwards and infer a broad similarity of the moral standing of causes and political positions from a broad similarity of character. Some options are better than others and some political positions are more just, even if we cannot infer good character of political agents from their political sympathies. Michael Walzer (1996) put the point nicely some years ago in a brief piece in *Dissent* magazine when he said that "the political character of a march is not determined by the moral character of the marchers." These two are not one. There is, however, a danger here of letting good intentions get in the way and producing a sort of confessional approach to political life. By this, I mean something close to a politicized equivalent of original sin in which preoccupation with a basic and shared level of human flaw directs attention away from very real differences of character. In which case, the claims that this approach avoids skepticism about character differences would be hollow. However, I am not at all denying differences of character, but merely the idea that they may reliably be read off of political alignment. Character does not map well onto political alignment. This may even be a contingent matter, a matter of the way in which political traditions have developed. It could well be that in some other time or place, political alignment really could be a better guide to character. Nothing about human nature, or fallenness, or our base materials prevents this from being the case. The claim is strictly about *the way things stand now* and the way they have generally stood throughout the era of social democracy's dominance on the left. Left causes may be better or worse than those championed by average agents in the political center or at least those on the right. But, as people, agents of the left (such as myself) do not stand in relation to one another as the friends of virtue set against its enemies.

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5 Gaining Concepts
Appeals to *Ahimsa*

Previous chapters have tried to perform two key tasks. The first has been to move away from any idea that an ethics of dissent should be based upon fixed principles rather than the navigation of complexities and pathfinding in the face of many-sided claims. The second has been to shift toward a broader range of situationally sensitive concepts which have ethical significance and relevance to dissent. These have included the usual concepts of political discourse within liberal democracies, such as rights and interests, together with the concept of dissent itself, understood in the light of the demanding example of the dissident. Weaving around these concepts, a further range of ethical concepts such as hope and puritanism, courage, character, and truthfulness have been drawn upon. Others, such as politicized love and grief, will be brought into the discussion as we progress.

A more reductionist and binary conception of politics as a matter of identifying friends and opposing enemies has also been set aside in favor of a pluralistic conception of "the political," which is less modeled upon warfare. The idea of political ethics as largely a matter of picking sides may be a plausible description of the situation in France in the 1780s, but it is less helpful within contemporary liberal democracies where poverty still exists, but is more localized, and where injustices overlap but often without reducing political agents to poverty. Contemporary dissent within liberal democracies is rarely driven by poverty or by the sorts of political oppression faced by dissidents. It comes from lots of different directions, has multiple drivers, and different relationships to those in positions of political power. This does not exactly mean that there are no sides, but rather that there are many sides and shifting configurations across different issues.

This is a point with particular importance for the concepts that we bring into play. While it may be useful to explicitly draw attention to the concepts used, it is also important to remember those not mentioned or whose role has been slight and belongs to various roads not travelled. They include appeals to hypocrisy and betrayal. Concepts of this sort are likely to have a good deal of work to do in conceptions of political conflict which are binary and far less work to do within conceptions of political

DOI: 10.4324/9780429022524-6

conflict that are pluralistic. Within a binary conception, finding oneself on the same side over issue x, but on different sides over issue y might well suggest that someone has switched camp and become a turncoat, or that they were only ever fickle, or partly committed allies. Within a more pluralistic account of political conflict, we should not always expect to see the same faces. When we do, it is probably because conceptions of left and right, with the associated history and traditions, are still shaping patters of political action. This division is an important historical legacy that we are still working through. We are not yet at the end. The idea of a left/right contrast continues to have significance, but largely as a matter of negative alignment (opposition to various things) and identification with various historical traditions. While accepting the continuing importance of the distinction, I have not drawn upon any assumption that there are virtues of character on the left that other agents lack. Rather, I have suggested that liberal democracy tends toward a broad uniformity of things valued, such as various political freedoms. Even the slightest qualification of liberal democratic norms, under conditions of a global pandemic that took more than four million lives in its first 18 months is enough to generate anger, protest, indignation, and overreaching claims of dictatorship. Whatever we say against it, few of us on left, right, or center would choose to live under any other known system in spite of the many limitations of liberal democracy and in spite of the hope that something better may one day emerge. It would be disappointing if humanity could not do better. Nonetheless, we are currently locked into liberal democratic norms and values whose emergence is historically recent and whose long-term future is by no means certain.

In the three remaining chapters, these moves will be consolidated through a stress on the importance of our care for one another, for creatures beyond the human, and for humanity itself, thought of as an ongoing moral community. Political compassion and love will play an important role in these chapters, not just as aspects of our shared humanity, but more narrowly as pivotal aspects of our political agency. My primary reason for thinking that they are relevant to political agency is the idea that we do not leave our humanity at the door when we enter into political activity. We may hide it from ourselves as much as from others, but it continues to shape our actions, our ways of identifying, and the forms of dissent that we engage in. Appeals to compassion and to the possibility that love has important political dimensions have become familiar moves over the past couple of decades, although they remain tentative moves which are often difficult to situate within a picture of rights, duties, consequences, and virtues such as courage and justice. The overall picture itself has been conspicuously limited or bounded by a focus upon politics and political dissent within liberal democracies, with consideration of the predicament of the dissident operating as the main exception. There is a danger in such a bounded approach, a risk that we might think of liberal democracies as

enclosed or conceptually self-sufficient. Instead, I will suggest that it is far from obvious that liberal democracies have all the required concepts ready to hand (Diamond 1988). Even if we successfully deal with the dangers of reductionism and a loss of concepts, we might still find ourselves at a loss, with something missing when trying to make sense of dissent that happens *here* rather than *elsewhere*. There may well be a need or at least *advantages to* gaining concepts. This can be done through the creative moves of inventing terminology. Another option is the potentially destabilizing one of bringing in concepts in from outside of the familiar liberal democratic repertoire.

This chapter will be a case study in the problems associated with this move, the bringing in of one of the more familiar candidates for appropriation: *ahimsa*. A concept with clear connections to the ideas of compassion and of possible ways of politicizing love. The case study will focus upon the idea that this concept might be usefully appropriated by those who engage in veganism as a form of dissent. This chapter will argue that gaining concepts in this way has advantages, but also poses several significant problems: difficulties of harmonizing across familiar liberal democratic and outside concepts; fidelity to the appropriated concept; and concerns about cultural appropriation and about the ways that such appropriation can feed back into cultures of origin. The easiest way to appropriate is, after all, to misappropriate. To create an orphaned concept, stripped of the context that brought it into being. We can see this in the case of *ahimsa* (which has multiple and complex associations) when it is reduced down to something far thinner, such as a mere repetition of our concept of non-harm. The reductionist tendency in the way that broadly liberal democratic concepts are themselves used is then reproduced when the new concepts are brought in from the outside, without allowing them a sufficiently distinctive role. Nonetheless, there may still be a good deal to gain from pluralizing discourses in this way, in spite of all the risks. It can, for example, serve as a corrective to reductionist tendencies rather than merely reproducing them. In a sense, appropriating this concept can be thought of as the precise opposite of an appropriation of Schmitt's reduction of the political to friend/enemy relations, an affirmation of what we share, and the ultimate limitations of political conflict given the realities of shared moral community.

I A disconnect between ethical theory and animal advocacy

There is often a disconnect between animal rights theory and what animal rights activists actually appeal to on a routine basis. The gap in question sits between what is said in formal ethical theories of animal rights, and what actually drives animal advocacy. It is a disconnect between standpoints rather than a division between persons. Some agents who support vegetarian and vegan diets find themselves on both sides of

the divide. On the one side, there are familiar philosophical texts, from Peter Singer (1995) and Tom Regan (2004), through to contemporary talk about a "political turn" in animal rights (Milligan 2015). These tend to be broadly liberal democratic and secular. Their authors may be social democratic, socialist, green, politically conservative, or lacking any fixed identity in matters of party politics, but their product is nonetheless based upon varying conceptions of core values such as liberty and equality and upon associated modes of justification – modes of justification which aspire to an authority that is independent of any special religious or metaphysical beliefs. The discourse that they contribute to is broadly liberal democratic, in the sense that these values give them shape. Disputes across positions are then framed in terms of the relative importance of each value, how they are best construed and applied to nonhumans, and how they might play off one another.

Commitment to equality is a case in point. Some theories of animal ethics place greater weight upon it than others. Their arguments run in ways that depend strongly upon appeals to "speciesism" as a form of illegitimate bias against nonhuman animals (Dunayer 2004). Such views do not simply argue for animals to have their special rights acknowledged. Instead, they argue for equal entitlements and equal rights, such as an entitlement not to be killed and eaten. Other theories of animal ethics, which are broadly set against animal consumption, focus more upon the inclusion of animal interests within an overall conception of the common good. Even though it is recognized that the interests of nonhuman animals may differ from case to case (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011). Squirrels do not have the same interests as elephants, although both have interests which relate to trees. The idea, on such an interest-based approach to animal rights, is not simply that animals deserve consideration, but more specifically that their interests should be considered when formulating ideas of the common good and not weighed against the latter as something separate. The values embedded in such an approach concern community, solidarity, or (in somewhat antiquated language) fraternity. Equality is still there at some level, particularly in the form of an equal entitlement to have one's interests considered. But overall, the notion of equality is asked to do less work. The disagreements across such varying positions are real, but they are also bounded by a common language of rights, justice, and equality, together with a repertoire of associated concepts which are strongly connected to political practices of liberal democracy and to talk about the core values of the latter. They are the concepts which we live by in what many of us regard as the best societies that we have yet constructed. Perhaps something better will follow and we may hope for a better future, but for now this may be the best game in town.

On the other side, there is a mass of online materials, Facebook posts and blogs, pamphlets, activist magazines, special consumer publications,

and books from publishing houses whose audiences include those who identify with some or other counterculture and often end up stocked on the more bohemian bookshelves of Glastonbury in England or Asheville in North Carolina. Bourgeois respectability is consistent with reading and producing such materials, but it is not exactly required. Animal rights advocacy, thought of in this sense, does not share the same liberal democratic theoretical bounds as animal rights theory. Its bounds are larger, but also less well defined. Often, it draws upon imagery and concepts from spiritual discourses, and more especially from politicized versions of them, with Eastern religions occupying a favored position: Buddhism, Hinduism, and the Jain tradition, in particular, although various forms of green spirituality and neo-paganism are also present. Here, I focus upon the former rather than the latter.

As exemplars, we may think of online posts and videos by Gary Francione on the one hand and materials produced by Kim Stallwood on the other. Francione is well known in animal rights circles for linking popular animal advocacy with appeals to *ahimsa* and to the Jain tradition. Francione is also on both sides of the divide, having authored a sequence of scholarly texts on animal rights which reserve the *ahimsa* concept for the occasional footnote (1996, 2000, 2008). Qua academic, he writes in the broadly liberal democratic manner, with a special emphasis upon equalizing human and nonhuman treatment. Qua animal advocate, he uses the concept more often. Stallwood (2004, 2014) is a longstanding animal rights activist, someone pivotal to recent international initiatives, and whose involvement in vegetarian and vegan dissent reaches back to the first wave of modern activism in the 1970s. His autobiographical *Growl* (2014), complete with forward by the musician Brian May, is another case in point. One of the original thoughts was to call it *Animal Dharma*, in line with the Buddhist influence upon Stallwood's thought, particularly in the form of an emphasis upon compassion, nonviolence, and the epistemic (knowledge-related) aspects of both. Dharma is appealed to less often than *ahimsa* and to *satyagraha* and may suggest a fuller understanding of the relevant traditions. This migration of religious concepts from Asia has been going on for some time.

At a more institutional level, we may consider the way in which the *satyagraha* concept, drawn from Gandhi and generally used to mark out actions such as noncooperation and civil disobedience, directly influenced the "open rescue" movement that emerged in Australia from 1993 onwards, under the initial leadership of Patty Mark, and which then spread to Europe and the US (Hawthorne 2005). The focus of the movement was upon liberating small and easily portable animals such as chickens from the food system and upon openly accepting the consequences of doing so. Its political inspiration was Gandhi rather than the Animal Liberation Front or other forms of activism and advocacy which had become mired in accusations of intimidation. Similar motivation shaped

the founding of the prominent animal advocacy and environmentalist magazine *Satya* the following year. Open rescue is still practiced internationally, if intermittently (Milligan 2013). The appeal made to satyagraha is informative and conveys a sense of what the movement is all about (Milligan 2017). When Patty Mark was imprisoned in 1999 after a rescue of battery hens and disclosure of the conditions in which they were held, she began a fast, effectively a hunger strike, claiming that the prison authorities insisted on serving chicken meals. The Gandhian overtones of the action aroused a good deal of public sympathy, and she was released. Even to this day, the website of Animal Liberation Victoria, the organization founded by Patty Mark, and one of several groups engaging in open rescue, places particular emphasis upon the concept of truth: the truth about cows, the truth about pigs, the truth about goats, and so on. In so doing, it echoes the *satya* element of satyagraha. However, their publicity tends to echo satyagraha without directly appealing to it. The concept has operated as more of an insider term than a way of describing open rescues for the broader public.

II The assumption of harmony with liberal democratic concepts

The concept of *ahimsa* has tended to function as part of the broader currency of animal advocacy and not just as an insider term. Its historic roots can be found in Vedic literature, a body of ancient texts, dating back to the second millennium BCE, predating and feeding into various different Eastern religions and their politicized reworkings. Regular use by animal rights activists dates back to at least the 1990s, when there was a good deal of pressure to create distance from Animal Liberation Front paramilitary imagery and practices. Here, for example, is a typical account of that period, drawn from an article entitled "Ahimsa (Noninjury) Revisited" by Michael W. Fox of the Humane Society of the US:

> The ancient Sanskrit word ahimsa, meaning noninjury, is the doctrine of refraining from the harming of others. It is the central teaching of Jainism, Hinduism and Buddhism. As an ethical principle, we find it in the Judeo-Christian concept of the Golden Rule that holds that we should not do harm to others…it is implicit in the medical maxim 'physician do no harm.'
>
> (Fox 1993: 156)

The above (and again, typical) paper was originally delivered at the 1993 Jain Association's North America Convention and exemplifies a range of connections. It draws most directly from the Jain tradition, by applying the concept of no harm to life in general and not only to sentient beings. Talk of the latter carries more Buddhist overtones, for example,

compassion for all sentient beings. Jainism has traditionally presented itself as a stricter application of life valuing principles than anything that can be found within Buddhism. The strength of the requirement, when formulated in Jain terms, does however raise a problem which is common to ecology and to all sorts of biophilia or reverence for life. Albert Schweitzer's sympathetic analysis of *ahimsa* within the Jain tradition in *Indian Thought and Its Development* (1935) was quick to point out that the requirement cannot strictly be complied with and that the avoidance of suffering will often conflict with the desire to preserve life. "When the suffering of a living creature cannot be alleviated, it is more ethical to end its life by killing it mercifully than it is to stand aloof" (Schweitzer 1935: 83). On this persuasive view, life as such ought not to be seen as a characteristic protected in ways which actually add to the suffering in the world. A point reinforced by Gandhi, through his endorsement of euthanasia for suffering creatures, and also for humans who took an informed choice to end their lives (Gielen 2012). "The principle of not-killing and not-harming must not aim at being independent, but must be the servant of, and subordinate to, compassion. It must therefore enter into practical discussion with reality" (Schweitzer 1935: 84).

This element of the need for pragmatic engagement spans traditions, is present in Fox above, and tends to be acknowledged even by Jains, although their attitude toward practical ethical questions might be seen as more puritanical than Buddhism, with its talk of a middle path. Practices associated with both, for example, *bramacharya* (chastity through spiritual means, a concept also emerging out of the Vedas), are inflected in a distinct way within the Jain tradition, with sex regarded explicitly as a destructive act, hence directly contrary to *ahimsa*, rather than a creative act. It is, of course, possible to overstate the differences in practice between life as a Jain and as a Buddhist or as someone strictly adhering to a Gandhian ethic. However, the notion of strictness and renunciation is generally thought of as significantly stronger among Jains and as a recommendation of the latter for those who want to commit more to all living things. One expression of this is the idea (common to both traditions) that Mahavira (a pivotal figure in the development of Jain doctrine) was not simply a contemporary of the Sakyamuni Buddha (the historical Buddha), but was one of the aesthetics whose path he explicitly rejected as too preoccupied with self rather than enlightenment. This is impossible to verify; but as a piece of imagery, it makes sense of the rolling controversy between the two: with Jains saying that Buddhists are not really practicing *ahimsa* and Buddhists saying that Jains are insufficiently focused upon alleviating actual suffering. As we may expect, accounts of the division vary. What does seem clear is that *ahimsa* is not just one thing across these traditions.

With qualifications about the version of the concept that is in question, I am sympathetic to talk about *ahimsa* and not just talk about animal

rights. While my own work on animal ethics is set out in terms geared to liberal democratic societies, there is something that a broadly liberal democratic ethical discourse, focused upon ideas such as rights, might easily miss. The discourse is, at least in some parts, a contingent historical by-product. Our shared history might easily have gone in different ways. In line with this, there seems to be no historic process which ensures that the discourse of animal rights is equipped with all of the concepts and intellectual resources that we need in order for it to be intelligible, plausible, and practical. I am, in other words, open to the idea of a need for supplementation, open to the idea that the above article as well as innumerable online websites and posts may be onto something good. My sympathy remains in place, even though supplementary concepts may destabilize familiar liberal assumptions, and that what Jacques Derrida called "the logic of supplementarity" can be disruptive (Derrida 1998: 163). Perhaps I am sympathetic to the idea of supplementation, because the supplementary concepts may have this effect.

A less heavy way to put the same point would be to say the following: I do not assume that the broadly liberal democratic discourse of animal rights and more spiritually inflected concepts automatically harmonize with one another. Fox, above, seems to carry this assumption of harmony and in this respect he is typical of a familiar activist or advocate approach. Animal advocacy often shifts from one set of concepts to another, as if there were no vulnerable joint or question of consistency to be raised. One problem with such an assumption of harmony in the case of *ahimsa* is that it is not just an appeal to non-harm. It is a spiritualization of commitment to it. A treading in territory where liberal democratic discourse ordinarily does not go, territory that it deliberately avoids.

My own rejection of any assumption that the concepts will automatically harmonize is rooted in a broader view of how concepts work. An understanding that draws upon the usual suspects of the Western and analytic tradition in the philosophy of language, particularly those such as Quine and Davidson who have promoted various forms of conceptual holism (Quine 1980; Davidson 1986). On such a view, concepts do not stand alone, but tend to be embedded within larger conceptual networks and sets of practices from which they draw their meaning. Individual concepts cannot always and easily be disentangled from this background and used in much the same sense elsewhere. Thin concepts, with few conceptual connections, may sometimes be moved around with comparative ease, but thicker concepts, those replete with meaning and connections, cannot easily be disentangled. Given this, my worry is not simply about the supplementing and partial subversion of broadly liberal democratic norms if we assume that talk about *ahimsa* slots easily into liberal democratic discourse. It is also about how an assumption of harmony may simply fail to do justice to the complexities of the concept of *ahimsa* itself. Appropriation can be misappropriation. It may do violence to a tradition.

This becomes a special problem when the misappropriation occurs in places which exercise a special intellectual prominence on a global stage. The problematic reading of the concept may then shape ways in which it is presented in its source countries, as agents in the latter struggle to find ways to acquire greater political leverage on the world stage. This is a familiar worry about Western Buddhism, particularly about the exportation of forms of Tibetan Buddhism. Not just the issue of its fidelity to the source, but what happens when the salmon swims back upstream and Western modifications start to influence the way that traditional practices and concepts are understood in Buddhism's heartlands.

III *Ahimsa* as a contested concept

As it is appealed to by animal rights activists, *ahimsa* performs at least two sorts of work. First, it is understood as a commitment to "non-harm" in human-animal relations. Second, it is understood as a way of modeling activism, advocacy, and human-to-human relations, such that violence is excluded or at least pushed into the territory of unlikely special cases. Some appeals to *ahimsa* draw upon only one or other of these dominant senses, but both are widely present, as is their fusion. An upshot of this is that commitment to *ahimsa* is more likely to be bound up with identity than support for any particular campaign. A person may support a campaign without any change in their sense of who they are. Commitment to *ahimsa*, by contrast, tends to be thought of as a way of being and acting in the world or (in less laden terms) being the change that one wants to see in the world. It is something that might well carry over from one special context or cause to another, although some agents may partition their thinking in ways which limit talk of *ahimsa* only to matters concerning animals.

None of this means that any broader and more detailed ethical or philosophical commitments can be read off of the use of the term by animal rights activists. And this is partly because of *ahimsa*'s contested nature, even within its source traditions. Appeal to it crosses over the familiar fracture lines within animal rights advocacy, between supporters of immediately attainable reforms and opponents of such reforms. Stallwood and Francione, mentioned above, hold very different views about animal rights and effective engagement in support of them. Stallwood is broadly pragmatic, Francione is not. Yet, both have appealed in prominent ways to *ahimsa* and to spiritual values (Stallwood 2004: 156–168; Francione 2007).

It is possible to try and establish a positional alignment on the cheap, through a claim that the concept of *ahimsa* has some exclusive sense, and that it is misused unless appealed to in support of my position, or your position, or Francione's position, or Stallwood's position, and that all other uses are illegitimate. I will, however, take it that this is a generally

disreputable approach toward any concept that has a complex history and a resulting open texture. In short, I take it that no one is in a unique position to specify *ahimsa*'s conceptual content and to do so in a radically exclusive manner. Such an attempt might itself involve a misunderstanding of the concept or of its multiple historic and ongoing roles. *Ahimsa* is, after all, not a term of art but a concept with a long past and a role within existing traditions. It is polysemous, that is, it has many sedimented layers of meaning, and these layers are often linked to patterns of use rather than to convenience or factional alignment. While we may be able to rule out some uses – otherwise the very idea of meaning would simply fall into the abyss – there are limits to our narrowing of legitimate use. We can, however, still give reasons for using the concept in one way rather than another. We may point out the advantages of doing so and point out the disadvantages of acting otherwise. There are also at least some relatively noncontroversial things which we can still say about the ways in which *ahimsa* has been used within the respective traditions that have done most to shape our understanding of it.

On this relatively noncontroversial side, I want to point out two things. First, although present in multiple religious traditions for at least 3,500 years and strongly linked to an idea of "non-harm," *ahimsa* has rarely been reduced to public behavior in any of the surviving historic sources. Rather, on most uses, it concerns the avoidance of inner conditions of anger, animosity, and intolerance toward others. (And the avoidance of other things too on Jain readings.) In some prominent uses, it concerns inner states even more than action and consequence. This is the case with Gandhi's influential reworking of the concept, which is highly critical of an instrumentalist tendency within Western political thought. *Ahimsa*, on the Gandhian reading, is partly commitment and not means to an end. However, it may also be useful to remember that the audience addressed by Gandhi in his most systematic treatment of these matters required no convincing of the need for political action. He may then have been presenting a corrective, by emphasizing inner states rather than seeking to disconnect the latter entirely from goal-directed action. The combining of political goal and concern for an inner state of freedom from various desires would certainly be more in line with his earlier thoughts in *Hind Swaraj* (1909).

The text that I have in mind as more representative of his mature thought is not the latter. I am also a little uneasy about the place of *Hind Swaraj* in Gandhi's thought. Even if it said more about *ahimsa* than it does, this seminal text might not be the best place to look for his mature understanding of the concept. Instead, the view here draws from his lectures on the *Bhaghavad Gita* delivered at Satyagraha Ashram between February and November 1926. The *ahimsa* concept also occurs more often in Gandhi's biographical two-part work *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927, 1929), and this too may look like an obvious

place to draw from. However, the autobiography is from around the same time as the *Gita* lectures (serialization began in 1925), but it is far less systematic. Added to which, *Gita* commentary was something of a minor industry around the Congress Party in the 1920s, a standard way to root political activism clearly in the Hindu tradition and to show that political innovations or Gandhian experiments did not make one a bad Hindu.

The *Gita* itself is the portion of the *Mahabharata* in which the central character Arjuna has a long dialogue with Krishna, the Hindu god of compassion, tenderness, and love. The dialogue occurs before a battle, with all the prospects of harm that implies. As the battle approaches, Arjuna has doubts about the fight. He has no hatred for those on the other side. Quite the contrary. So why kill them? Through dialogue, Krishna convinces Arjuna that he must carry out his duty, but must on no account rationalize his actions in terms of outcomes or give way to anger or otherwise become attached to the fruits of action. The inner state is primary. It is where the conquest of harm takes place, where such a conquest is assumed to be deepest, partly because it involves recognition of the artificial nature of any absolute division between a self (who is on the right side) and the other (on the wrong side). Here, I draw heavily upon Gandhi's reading of the text and do not hold back from the kinds of military imagery that he was particularly fond of deploying. His idea that the true conflict in the Gita is interior was not wildly idiosyncratic as a reading.

This emphasis upon the inner may even be the aspect of animal advocacy appeals to *ahimsa* which makes most sense in a liberal democratic political context, as a way of indicating depth of personal commitment. A way of indicating that an attitude toward harm is not simply strategic but reaches into the very fiber of someone's being. To say that a political agent abides by *ahimsa* implies a depth of commitment, which is rather different from saying that they are engaging in civil disobedience. Both are demanding, but the former is more so. An agent may, of course, be committed to *ahimsa* and also engage in civil disobedience. In which case, they may be engaging in the latter in a particular, deep, spiritually committed, way. Speaking about this as *satyagraha* and not only civil disobedience might not be too misleading.

The emphasis upon the inner also provides a way to query some uses of the *ahimsa* concept, or to query the extent to which agents who appeal to it understand the concept in anything like a traditional sense. Here, to make my point, I will briefly describe an imaginary vegan agent whose broader commitments can be specified. They are strongly partisan about support for a particular path toward the securing of animal rights and they run a playbook of standard moves when they argue. Running this playbook involves sticking to the story rather than engaging with the stories of others. The imagined agent in question advocates a vegan diet online, but not in the way that you or (hopefully) I may do so. Instead,

their advocacy involves intolerance, perhaps even up to the point of cyberbullying. Those who defend veganism or particular animals, but do not match up to this agent's rather detailed understanding of what a vegan is, may easily find their picture posted by the agent in close association with the word "hypocrite" and an indefinite number of exclamation marks to indicate moral outrage. Simple observations that it is better to reduce harm than to persist with the status quo induce overly long responses from the agent, complete with references to some preferred blog or talk which supposedly provides a definitive case for their view; but, upon closer examination, turns out only to repeat it. The presupposition of the imagined and clearly intolerant agent is one of moral superiority over others, based solely upon dietary practice and associated justifying beliefs.

Although such an agent is more likely to sympathize with some theories of animal ethics rather than others, their actions and motivations are not entailed by any established theory. Agents approximating to this picture have been around for decades and have sympathized with a variety of positions. The picture is quite a harsh one but will be familiar to at least some readers at least as an approximation to agents encountered. It is certainly *not* a picture of any particular individual but something closer to an archetypally intolerant activist who happens to be committed to a good cause. Agents of this sort are one of the downsides of the culture of animal advocacy rather than the offshoot of a particular misfiring theory. My point is not to suggest that one approach is responsible. Indeed, I suspect that the picture would be familiar in a world where any particular and familiar animal rights theory had not been developed. My point, instead, is that such an imagined agent could not be engaging in *ahimsa* on anything which is close to a classic understanding of the concept. Rather, if any concept of *ahimsa* happens to be at all consistent with their practice, it must be an unusually thin one which reduces to the avoidance of actual physical violence or any endorsement of it. They may not hit anyone, but the inner requirements of all traditional understandings of *ahimsa* are not being met. The agent's concept of *ahimsa* looks suspiciously like a simple concept of nonviolence. As this is something which may easily be captured by liberal democratic discourse concerning civility in public action, there is also no obvious need to supplement a broadly liberal rights discourse with it.

While there are numerous ethical problems with the imagined animal advocate, what seems to be missing from the point of view of *ahimsa* as regularly understood is a sense of connection to others, beyond their circle of friends and associates. A sense of connection that might make an urge to harm or even humiliate opponents fall away. A more formal way of making the point would be to say that part of what is missing from any conception of *ahimsa* which is focused upon public behavior is what Gandhi recognized as the concept's epistemic dimension. On Gandhi's

approach, the inner rejection of animosity was not simply a matter of being nice or civil (2001, 2011). Rather, it was a *recognition* that divisions between self and other break down at some point. Here, we might also think of a metaphysical or ontological dimension to the concept: a dimension which speaks to what we are and not just to what we know. In Gandhi's terms, again drawn from the lectures on the *Gita* and employing an oceanic metaphor, we are different waves upon the same sea. "All souls are like waves in water, that is, they are but different forms of that water…All this goes on. The rising of a wave means being born, and the wave subsiding means death" (Gandhi 1926: 168). Unity is the underlying reality. The kinds of hostility toward other humans which are implicated in intolerance and hostility presuppose an artificially strong separability of the self. A self who is in the right, while others are in the wrong. A self who is a better sort of person. But this strongly separable self must surely carry over into the attitude toward non-humans too. If I am a being apart, then I remain a being apart irrespective of who else is in the room and irrespective of the species I happen to belong to. It may still be the case that I can be committed to the avoidance of harming animals or hitting humans, but this cannot be because the boundary between self and animal ever truly breaks down, even at the deepest level.

This leads me to the second relatively noncontroversial point about *ahimsa* as it has historically been understood. There is a presupposition on the part of many animal rights activists that *ahimsa* actually entails vegetarianism or even veganism. To some extent, this draws upon the Jain tradition and upon the way that Gandhi helped to popularize the concept in the West. However, the relationship between *ahimsa*, diet, animal harms, and violence of different sorts has always been far more complex and not at all straightforward or absolutist. Even if we take the tale of Arjuna and Krishna's dialogue and interiorize it, so that the impending battle is not understood as outer military conflict with corpses on fields but inner moral (even psychological) conflict, we will still be left with a long tradition of texts, the Vedas in particular, in which *ahimsa* and various forms of harms to both humans and animals are regarded as permissible, if regrettable or even required. There are cases of this in Gandhi too, for example, his claim that soldiers should for the most part follow orders, even though the orders involve harm. But they should do so in a certain spirit and without attachment to the questionable cause which has guided their orders. The other side of *satyagraha*, thought of as periodic noncooperation with the state, was cooperation, in spite of an awareness of the harms that it may inflict and even though killing may be involved. The capacity to kill, which might be cultivated by military service, was viewed by Gandhi as integral to the capacity for nonviolence (Parekh 1989: 60). This is a disturbingly gendered aspect of his views, with manliness repeatedly appealed to as an aspect of virtue; but his position on the permissibility of causing harm without malice

does seem to be reasonably well aligned with a plausible reading of the *Gita* and with the larger text that it is part of, the *Mahabharata*. Animal rights activists also focus upon *ahimsa*, but there is at least some case for viewing it in the light of proximate but nonidentical concepts such as *anrshamsya*, a concept of noncruelty rather than non-harm (Lath 2009; Das 2013). But one would have no need of such a concept, alongside *ahimsa*, if harm itself was always impermissible.

The Vedic literature itself legitimated animal sacrifice and did so in the pivotal earliest texts. The ideas of *ahimsa* and animal sacrifice do not seem to exist so much in parallel but in a way which is entangled, through the eroded sense of self that is identified above. The entanglement continues today in various successor Hindu traditions of animal sacrifice, particularly within Shaktism and Tantra traditions in popular Hinduism and to some extent in higher caste practices. Also, in terms of routine dietary practices, it is simply not true that most Hindus are vegetarians. The entanglement of sacrifice (*yajna*) and *ahimsa* is recurring. In the Vedas, this is partly because animal sacrifice was not exclusively communication with the gods, but was expressive of broader themes of sacrifice, ultimately leading to the final sacrifice of self, a sacrifice which sustains and balances the world, uniting the human with the nonhuman (Das 2013). A grasp of *ahimsa* would then be integral to an understanding of the spiritual significance of animal sacrifice within the tradition rather than being at odds with the sacrificial theme and something readily disentangled from the latter.

We might still think of *ahimsa* more exclusively in the revised terms of Gandhi, or as it is understood in some of the more popular variants of contemporary Buddhism rather than in the Vedas themselves, or only in terms of restricted models of Hindu practice which treat Hinduism as a sort of distinct world religion connected to vegetarianism rather than a movable feast, operating in different ways at a local level. And this could establish a stronger link to vegetarian dietary practice, the link that many animal rights activists either presuppose or seek to embrace through appeals to *ahimsa* as a grounding feature of their own ways of living. In support, there are Buddhist sutras that we might readily look to, such as the Kutadanta Sutta in the *Digha Nikaya*, the longer discourses of the Buddha within the earliest source, the Pali Cannon (Walshe 1995). In the latter, the Brahmin Kutadanta plans a great sacrifice of bullocks, heifers, male goats, and rams. Seven hundred of each. He visits Gotama (the Buddha) to ask how the sacrifice ought to be made in the proper manner. In return, he is told a tale of another sacrifice in which no living being is subject to slaughter, but the sacrifice instead is carried out with ghee, oil, butter, curd, honey, and molasses, meeting the requirement for kinds of things and modes of sacrifice. It is a beautiful text, with a striking vision. But there is more than one voice in the *Digha Nikaya*, and in its account of Buddha's own final meal, he does seem to have consumed a gift of meat. (An allusion, perhaps,

to its ambivalent place.) Any link to strict vegetarianism is also unlikely to hold up in the case of the more popular contemporary Buddhist traditions such as Tibetan Buddhism, although Zen traditions are a little different again, because meat consumption is not actually ruled out and neither is the consumption of animal products more generally. Traditional food production in Tibet is pastoral based upon grazing and not grain. Hence, the butter candles. Tibetan veganism is something uncommon. Anthropologists committed to veganism at home experience difficulties.

These are historical reflections and reflections upon religious traditions, which draw attention to the problematic connection between vegetarianism and *ahimsa* as it is understood in parts of Asia where the concept is at home. Vegetarianism can be made sense of by appeal to *ahimsa*, but is not strictly required by it, except within the Gandhian reworking of Hinduism and within the Jain tradition whose concepts of *ahimsa* give cause for concern on broader grounds of strictness and practicality. Drawing strict vegetarianism or even a case for veganism directly from the Jain tradition might come with some unwelcome strings attached. Particularly so if we think that the animal rights movement already has its own significant strands of puritanism to deal with.

IV Summarizing the problems

Above, I have mentioned two of the problems of appropriation. The first is the danger of misrepresentation and erosion when a concept such as *ahimsa* is adapted to the purposes of political conflict within liberal democracies and used in ways which may be radically at odds with its origins. This is not an overriding reason for exclusion, and there are liberal democracies at the crossroads of political cultures (e.g., Japan) where the issues might be of a different sort. But it is a reason for caution about appropriation. The second identified danger concerns the ambiguity of the concept. And here I do not simply mean the ambiguity that is present almost everywhere within language and which may sometimes work in ways that favor ethical openness. Rather, I mean the ambiguity that is found specifically in religious discourse and which may be better suited to the latter than to all areas of life. Religion may need a cautiously deployed ambiguity about matters of ontology, about what exists, partly because it draws so heavily upon imagery and metaphor. In the case of *ahimsa*, the concept as traditionally used carries a good deal of ambiguity on matters concerning the nature of the self. In some sense, it is bound up with a rejection of rigid separation of self and others. But the precise sense is less determinate. Does it mean that there is no self akin to the liberal self, that is, a pinpoint of will and choice that we use when ascribing political rights? Or that we are each selves but share a common humanity or a common creaturely existence? Or that there are ultimately no selves at all *in the sense that we imagine them*, as in the Buddhist theory of *anatta*?

Or does it literally mean that you and I and everyone we know are really different waves on the same sea, as Gandhi says? What *ahimsa* inherits is not the regular openness of so many concepts such as freedom and justice, but the much stronger ambiguity so often embedded in religious discourses.

Under analysis, this may turn out to be the first problem, the risk of misappropriation, in a different guise. It is at least related to it. A sufficiently ambiguous concept can be a playground for those who are puritanically minded, a place where they can read whatever they like into a favored terminology and then roll it out as a way to overemphasize the differences between agents: vegan and non-vegan, ally and opponent, enemy and friend. By contrast, Gandhi used *ahimsa* in ways which stress commonality and shared ground. This need not remove confrontation. After all, self-immolators also seem to share this understanding of *ahimsa*. They present opponents with the spectacle of their burning bodies in the belief that shared vulnerabilities may help to move others toward compassionate response. But it is far from clear that *ahimsa* is generally used by animal rights activists in ways which stress such assumed commonalities rather than separation from opponents and from those who sit outside of some preferred dietary practice. The picture here is at least mixed.

Beyond these two related problems, there is a third, which is connected to both. Where there is an excessive or exaggerated ambiguity, opportunities for evasion are never far behind. Appeals to *ahimsa* may offer occasions for flight, hiding places from clarity about the basic requirements of any social ethic, that is, the kind of ethic which can draw upon support from a broad range of political agents, who may have significantly different belief systems but who belong to the same political community. If my concern is mainly with how I as an individual live, then I do not need to worry about such matters. If I am concerned with what society ought to do, the situation changes and the prospect of securing assent remains central to how any plausible ethic can be set out. Here, I am drawing upon a point which is implicit in at least some of the talk in recent years about a "political turn" in animal rights (Milligan 2015). It involves a recognition of the difference between the individual and social levels of ethics, between questions such as "Should I be a vegan?" and questions such as "Should society as a whole embrace veganism?" Answering the former and even giving good reasons for the answer does not automatically generate an answer to the latter. What individuals can or should do and what is socially viable are not always one and the same. The social is constrained by a set of pragmatic considerations which we, as individuals, can often break free from. This may lead us to imagine that everyone else may do the same. But "if I can do it, then everyone can" does not hold when populations become as large as a village. It certainly does not hold in complex modern societies with millions of people. This does not mean that we cannot in the future have vegetarian or vegan societies.

We may well do so. There are some aspects of food systems, demographics, change in biotechnologies, and economics which make this a live option and perhaps a good option. I think that it is. But it is unlikely that any such societies will be based upon specialized religious commitments, such as *ahimsa*, which fit more readily into the territory of individual commitment than they do into the direct formation of policy and law. After all, *ahimsa* goes beyond behavior. We cannot legislate for it as a requirement, even if one day we may legislate against the legality of animal slaughter. Just as we currently legislate against certain kinds of animal slaughter. The avoidance of cruel systems may be mandated, while anything akin to spiritual commitment is extra. Beyond the proper scope of liberal democratic states.

Appealing to a specialized metaphysical or religious viewpoint in response to shared matters within a liberal democracy is always problematic. As a qualifier, it is important that there is a place for such viewpoints to spill over from private life and into public discussions. Squeezing religiosity out of the public domain can have some terrible side effects: when it returns, it can do so in unexpected and alarming ways. And so, I am not trying to argue that *talk* of *ahimsa* belongs exclusively to the domain of individual ethical commitment, but simply that the individual/social distinction helps us to understand the limitations of such talk within the public domain. Even when they figure within the latter, it is important that the influence of specialized metaphysical views of any sort is restricted and that it remains largely at the level of precursor discussions, where commonalities are sought across different viewpoints, rather than at the level of policy-apt discussions which may directly shape laws. Nonetheless, at a personal level and at a networking level, the advantages of the concept of *ahimsa* do seem to be genuine. It helps to broaden the conceptual repertoire of animal advocacy, the shared language which can express a strong commitment to the importance of other creatures and commitment of a sort that may often be stronger than talk about respect or duty. This commitment may sometimes be hard to capture in the broadly liberal democratic language of animal rights theory and law, a language more geared to speak across differences in the metaphysical views that we hold and across differences in the religions to which we commit or reject. These advantages would, of course, be silenced if appeal to *ahimsa* simply entailed commitment to falsehoods of some sort. Appeal to *ahimsa* might then be rejected on grounds drawing from notions of respect and truthfulness in the political domain and on grounds drawing upon the satyagraha tradition, in which truth (*satya*) is nonnegotiable. If appeal to *ahimsa* entailed a call upon some unbelievable or patently false metaphysical view, this consideration might kick in. There is a disentangling way to solve this, but it is a simple resolution that we may do well to resist. We can appeal to the ethical content of *ahimsa*, thought of as something apart from associated metaphysical

commitments. However, this radically thins out its sense and creates a strong separation from the Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu traditions which have helped to give the concept its content. Concerns about appropriation becoming misappropriation would then be even more forceful. As would worries about redundancy, the mere repackaging of ideas which can already be set out exhaustively using the existing conceptual repertoire of liberal democracy.

Besides which, it is not clear that the metaphysical dimensions of the concept are entirely misleading. This is where the religious dimension of the concept and its ambiguity may be both useful and problematic. As traditionally understood, it helps to erode any sense of absolute disconnection between agents, self, and other. This would apply also to rights activists and their opponents. However, like so many of the concepts of religion, it tends toward ontological ambiguity rather than determinacy about the nature of this erosion and about the nature of the self. There is no one correct sense in which the term is used, a sense from which all metaphor and imagery might be stripped, allowing us to read ontological commitments directly from literal statements. If the metaphors do not reduce in this way, *ahimsa* will not yield determinate ontological commitments, that is, commitments concerning what there is, what the self is, and how it relates to others.

Does all this ultimately invite the rather dull conclusion that we ought to tread gently when using the *ahimsa* concept and show restraint with regard to the work that we assign it and expect it to perform? The answer, again, seems to be yes. And perhaps there are particular versions of the concept which require more caution than others, such as Jain versions. Not because of anything better or worse about the version, but because of the respective ways in which different accounts play when combined with the strands of puritanism already present within animal rights advocacy. But it may also direct us toward a more interesting claim. The combination of value and danger, usefulness and risk associated with use of the *ahimsa* concept may point toward the idea that perhaps we should not attempt to unify the discourses of animal rights advocacy and broadly liberal democratic animal ethics. Perhaps the case for animals and the end of meat-eating ought not to be too unitary. It may benefit instead from embracing a rough and ready pluralism about how best to argue for vegetarianism and veganism while showing due respect for truth and deliberation. Even if there are grounds for more discussion across advocacy and ethical theory and for some crossover work, they nonetheless perform very different roles and may need to call upon different resources in order to do so. What makes this interesting beyond the overview that it provides is the way in which resistance to any attempt to fuse or entirely collapse the boundary between discourses may itself tend to reinforce broadly liberal democratic norms concerning engagement with opponents. After all, those who support animal rights and oppose the continuation of current

systems of harm cannot reasonably present every kind of partitioning in the ways that meat eaters think about animals as a form of hypocrisy, if partitioning is also a feature of the different ways in which we (on the animal rights side) also think about animals. And this looks like a gain in clarity for my side of the arguments about food, ethics, and other creatures. The removal of a temptation to level misplaced and unduly hostile charges of hypocrisy at those who merely disagree with us about a matter of importance. Charges which, again, might lead us to imagine that *we* and our friends are good, while *they* and our opponents are bad.

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6 Political Grief and the Removal of Statues

I A worry about political compassion

One of the worries about doing justice to political opponents is the risk that we may understand a little too much and make allowances where they should not be made. Or we may make concessions that we have no right to make because they concern wrongs suffered by other people. In the UK, for example, I may show a certain understanding about those who believe in the Union that holds four nations together in a single but unequal condition. There are people who would mourn its passing and who would want some of its symbolism to continue even if a centralized British state gave way to more than one state. Even as an opponent of its continuation, I can see the sense of some concessions over the less offensive iconography and traditions. But from this it does not follow that I am entitled to show adopt a similar attitude toward those who defend the statues of slavers and the great patriarchs of empire. And this is not just because I think of one thing as more important than the other, but because I am simply the wrong person to show understanding or forgiveness about matters suffered by other sections of the population. The case here is conveniently clear-cut. Other cases may be less so. This chapter emerges out of a perplexity about boundaries of tolerance, a perplexity which follows on from the realization that matters may go badly wrong, but there are still no hard and fast rules to follow. Or, at least, any rules of principles we might set up will operate only as hints, clues, reminders, and habits. Sometimes a statue should be torn down, with or without official sanction for tearing it down; but when and by whom is less clear. It depends upon the particularity of circumstances. And this remains the case even if we are ready to accept that opponents will often have a right to grieve and will sometimes have this entitlement irrespective of the rights and wrongs of their cause.

Worries about compassionate sensibility become acute in cases of political grief where agents mourn the loss of things that we do not consider particularly admirable. An exemplar here is the "Lost Cause" of the Confederate South, memorialized in statues, flags, and highly dubious narratives about martial nobility and *casus belli*. The idea of the Lost

DOI: 10.4324/9780429022524-7

Cause is not about an actual cause that was lost beyond recovery, but about a more acceptable cause, constructed by subsequent generations with a declining level of connection to the actual but morally indefensible cause that drove secession and the formation of the Confederacy (Smith 2021). The tendency to romanticize the Confederacy but not, for example, the British slave system in Barbados is itself a curiosity. It involves a denial that slavery was the central issue of the Civil War; a forgetfulness about slavery's horrors in favor of exaggerated bonds of affection between owners and slaves; bad parallels between institutions of slavery in Rome and in the rural antebellum South; an ethically indefensible prioritizing of the issue of state rights over slavery; and a belief that slaves and their masters were better together because slaves were not yet ready for freedom. This chapter will try to show that an appreciation of the loss of others need not slip into an excess of concessions or a failure to take advantage of historic opportunities, such as the opportunity to remove Confederate statues, when there is only a limited window of opportunity to do so and where removal is bound to divide and generate a reaction. Unity is not an overriding political value, and appeals to it *as if it is overriding* are often used to cover over a multiplicity of wrongs. Overall, I want to defend the importance of coming to terms with the dreadfulness of loss for political opponents as an aspect of political compassion in the face of political grief. However, in the case of Confederate statues and related iconography, their defense does not for the most part involve such grief, but rather grievance politics which is something rather different. Sometimes that may present itself in the form of false grief rather than the real thing.

II Grief and grievance

There is a longstanding metaphor in which attitudes and emotions are not just responsive or dispositional, but something that might be "channeled." Anger, for example, might be channeled this way or that. It is there in Tolstoy's writings about dissent, it is conspicuously present in Martin Luther King's writings, and it pervades a good deal of what Gandhi has to say. For Gandhi, anger was not to be suppressed, but rather channeled and transformed into love. On the one hand, this involves the recognition that anger is an important part of human life and cannot simply be suppressed or avoided. On the other hand, there are difficulties with the metaphor when it is thought of in this way, with a combination of channeling and transformation through channeling. These difficulties return us to an unease about anger, thought of as an emotional response that plays an important role in scaled-up versions of dissent. To effect change, it may be necessary for people to become angry, but anger remains something that we have mixed feelings about.

I will take it that part of what makes an emotional state anger rather than frustration or resentment is the perception of wrongdoing and the desire to punish. Discernment, desires, and certain affective states or bodily feelings are involved. These things feature in almost all major accounts of anger, as they do in accounts of associated states such as rage. Attempts to come to terms with anger go back all the way within the written records of humanity, with the main lines of division established at an early point and then reproduced in different forms: anger is implicated in delusion; anger is necessary for certain kinds of strong motivation; anger is tied to punishments and harms; anger is discernment, a way of construing that the world is thus and so. The desire to punish claim is already there in Seneca's pivotal account, *De Ira*, from the mid-1st century of the Common Era. Seneca disapproved of the emotion for both metaphysical reasons (it projects an implausible freedom and responsibility onto others) and for practical reasons (those prone to anger lack self-control and are vulnerable to other harms). A more accepting attitude toward anger is implicit in Homer, in the wrath or rage of Achilles. It is an odd thing, but the first word of the Western literary cannon is *rage* or *wrath*, depending upon how literal we want to be. It is tempting to read a little too much into the fact, to suggest that the West was born in anger. But this projects continuity backwards and buys into too many renaissance and modern era mythologies of continuity between the ancient Greek world and the homelands of modern liberal democracy.

Even so, Homer presents a remarkable picture of an extreme form of anger or of an emotion closely tied to anger. Achilles wants to *punish* a succession of people, beginning with the commander of his own forces. He is in a state of culpable blindness or *atē*, made all the worse by his grief for a friend whose death is itself the unintended result of his refusal to take the field. Grief and rage, rage and grief drive the action. When it comes to motivation for great deeds, we may wonder "What else is there?" Eastern traditions which share Seneca's more skeptical approach toward the value of anger (Buddhism being the most obvious) do so in part because they agree with the analysis that anger includes the desire to punish or harm. And these seem like bad things, unless we buy into the idea that punishment benefits the agent who is punished. A redemptive thought which also seems like a convenient falsehood, a way of reassuring us that justice works for everyone, including those who are subjected to its most extreme penalties. Plato considered something of this sort, to square the circle between *what we want to believe* and *what seems plausible*: justice never harms, even those justly subject to capital punishment turn out to be better off dead (*Laws* 862c–863a). Claims likely to be disputed or classed somewhere among the noble lies. A life can be better for punishment, but often it will simply be worse, especially in the case of the more extreme punishments. Without such convenient falsehoods, punishment seems like real harm. It may make someone feel better, but it

will often make the punished agent worse off than they would otherwise be. The upshot is that harm, even in the interests of justice, remains real. As such, it is at odds with liberal sensibilities and in tension with commitment to compassion. It will also be at odds with the idea of *ahimsa*, even on thin versions, just so long as *ahimsa* requires us to abandon hostility toward others, even those we oppose over political matters. Anger, while it may not exactly be malice, still involves hostility of a sort, a desire that something be inflicted upon agents who are assumed to have done something wrong.

Against such unease about anger's value, the Homeric tradition, along with Aristotle and all manner of other approaches down to Freud, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, stress the important point that anger motivates in a way that nothing else does. We cannot simply set it aside because it helps to get things done, even if there may be a good deal of damage along the way. In Homer, it is the rage of Achilles that drives events forward, but it does so as the gods require and not in the way that he might want. He too ends up as its victim. Even so, the defenders of anger's motivational role have always come off best in this exchange. Partly because they seem closer to a sense of what human life is like. We have our complex emotional repertoire for good reasons, and trying to suppress any part of it rather than shaping our responses to the right occasions is liable to fare badly. Yet, anger is not a choice that we make, although we might deliberately work ourselves up into a state of anger in predictable ways (Solomon 2007: 21). Anger is, in most instances, something that simply goes with being human, feeling hurt and even resentful. Nor does this experience of anger need to depend upon any metaphysical views about freewill (as Seneca suspected) or upon a belief that others do wrong willingly, enthusiastically, or even through an exercise of free will. Whatever we think of arguments about freewill, P. F. Strawson (1962) was probably correct to say that we cannot stop holding others accountable and responding to them as culpable, through attitudes such as gratitude or resentment and we might add anger too. We can pretend or imagine otherwise, that a change in metaphysical views might change our pattern of emotional response, but experiencing anger is ultimately not optional.

In political life, how we work with anger is a difficult question. It is also a different question from whether or not we should ever feel anger toward opponents. The answer to the latter is almost certainly "yes," at least if we think along lines closer to Homer and Aristotle than to Seneca. Nonetheless, there are risks when drawing upon anger in some deliberate way order to drive political protest. One risk is associated with the desire to punish, which is not the same as the desire to win. Yet, the two may easily be confused. The risk is that winning is not enough, in that we reach a point in some conflict at which our opponents must also be made to suffer. Perhaps they do not need to do so in the way that we have

suffered or in the way that those we fight for have suffered, but there must be recompense or payback. There must be something more than the securing of a political objective. Indeed, political objectives may be unclear while the desire to punish is clear. This involves a welcoming of the experience of loss, a desire to make the other side suffer and even to humiliate them. It comes through in various ways, some of which can threaten to overshadow political critique. Donald Trump was not only opposed by many on the left for his political misdeeds in office, for his lack of respect for the constitution, apparent racism, and failures of leadership during the COVID-19 crisis. He was also criticized for his mannerisms and dress, his forward-leaning stance, the size of his hands, the tan on his face, and his distinctive hairstyle. Everything about him had to be shown to be ridiculous, a little "off." Part of such ridicule was not, of course, specifically about President Trump. Ridicule and satire are deflationary devices, used down through history to puncture the self-importance of political figures who overclaim greatness, genius, and success in delivering promises (Bakhtin 1984). Yet, it would be difficult to avoid the impression that opponents wanted to grind him into the dust. And here I do not mean those who are especially malevolent, but rather people like "me, you, and many of the people we know." That is to say, ordinary political agents with ordinary strengths and flaws. Nobody with a Homeric stature.

A desire of this sort is very different from wanting someone to be removed from office or accepting that there might be a good case for criminal prosecution following removal from office. We might accept these things but not feel as we do about Donald Trump. As it happens, I do hold these views about several political figures, but I do not feel about them in the way that I do about Donald Trump. And oddly, it is not a matter of the scale of wrongs but the manner in which they were carried out. It really has nothing to do with a comparison of death tolls, but with something about the blatancy of the appeals to racism, to an angry white demographic, and to the triviality of democracy that strikes home. Even to the extent of making a left which is often dismissive about the rule of law, recognize its importance, even while recognizing that its importance is qualified. The law should still be broken from time to time, as Gandhi recognized, but not in the way that it was broken by the onetime President and not for the ends that he pursued. The extent of rage against Mr. Trump exceeds even that against Margaret Thatcher, which is unusual, given the overlaying of misogyny on top of legitimate grounds for complaint against the latter. The rage itself is a remarkable phenomenon. In the early years of the Trump presidency, before the extent of citizen deaths overshadowed everything else, such attitudes risked cutting across the goal of ultimate removal from office, with charges of a basic lack of respect for the office of president sounding plausible to the uncertain middle ground in American politics. It is tempting to say that sections of the left would rather be angry than successful. That the dominant factor

in the makeup of the left is a politics of grievance, that is, of preoccupation with petty animosities and slights rather than any workable political vision for the future. This is an idea that may seem all the more plausible if we happen to regard left identity as mostly made up of history and traditions and negative. Being *of the left* is on such a view largely a matter of opposing various things and opposing various organizations and doing so in the light of a political tradition. The presence of any shared, forward-looking goal is far less significant. A terminology which only *suggests* shared goals will do just as well as actual shared goals.

I will accept that this "traditions and negative partisanship" approach toward left identity is a reasonable assessment of what holds much of it together. Shared ultimate goals of a uniquely left sort are hard to find. And I will accept that there is something to the charge of a preoccupation with anger and with petty hostilities rather than success. It would certainly help to explain one of the major peculiarities of the left internationally since the 1950s. That is, a hatred of Israel which is given precedence over all things, including state formation for the Palestinians. In this particular case, preoccupation with anger does seem to be linked to moral blindness, for example, difficulties recognizing antisemitism, unless it comes from self-avowed far-right political agents. When the sustaining of grievances matters more than the securing of actual goals, then outcomes which might benefit both sides rather than punishing one side may then seem unprincipled, unacceptable, immoral. Solutions without punishment and its harms will then seem unacceptable. People are then sacrificed to anger, and those sacrificed may well be those whose need is greatest. None of this is new. While a picture of compassionate political agency need not be thought of as an image of saintliness, it is difficult to square with a conception of politics that is driven in such a way, by anger against enemies or by grievance of any sort. A picture of compassionate political agency may instead be seen as consistent with a level of pragmatism geared to accepting that anger is always going to be part of the picture of political motivation, yet keeps goals in view more than punishments. At least with regard to wrongs of a sort that leave room for such a set of priorities. There are, after all, wrongs which cross terrible lines and which must be punished even if we ourselves pay a price to make this happen. Someone had to be held accountable for the Holocaust. But to say this is not to encourage an exaggerated sense of the wrongs of political opponents who are not the perpetrators of genocide. Most wrongs are not of such a nature that their punishment must take precedence over everything else.

A readiness to value goals over punishments can involve many things. One of these is an appreciation of what loss can be like for opponents and how dreadful it can be. The idea of loss, here, is different from that of sheer lack or inequality. It turns rather upon a notion of what was once there, a notion of *dispossession*, a concept which has emerged more

out of feminist discourse than socialist discourse in which images and metaphors of ownership and property are harder to work with.

Up to a point, we can make sense of the concept of dispossession by drawing upon the idea of political grief. A recognition of such grief as politically significant has steadily been advancing over the past two decades, with the advance accelerated by a growing recognition of the ineradicable role of emotions within politics. This seems also to have been accelerated by a number of other factors. First, the killings of large numbers of Black men by law officers in the US brought forward the recognition of an inegalitarianism of public grief: some deaths were grieved over far more than others (Butler 2003). Second, the experience of the Trump administration, when talks of democratic grief or grief for democracy became familiar, as longstanding political norms were systematically undermined (McIvor 2012). Talk of this sort refers, in many cases, to our own side. *We* are the ones who are grief-stricken, *we* are the ones who have lost something and mourn. My thought is that it applies just as well to the other side. And looking at the political other may provide a better pathway to an understanding our own sense of political loss than a more direct introspective approach. And this approach of working from the outside in rather than the inside out draws both upon certain philosophical inclinations and from thinking about grief as a paradigm emotion. Grief is always deeply personal. It is, as Judith Butler puts matters, *a mode of being dispossessed* (Butler 2003, 2013), but we make sense of it through our familiarity with the grief of others, as much as we do through processes of reflection upon our own predicament of loss.

The opening concern finds a place here, a worry that this acknowledgment of something so deep as grief may be politically debilitating. It may lead us to hold back from doing what is right out of a fear that we may harm political opponents who may already be multiply wounded. However, there is a difference between acknowledging genuine political grief, wherever we find it, and giving way in the face of a politics of grievance. Anger may come unattached from any reasonable justification and may attach itself instead simply to the nearest prejudice. I have already suggested that hatred of Israel, from agents who identify with histories and traditions that I also identify with, is an unwelcome grievance politics. An addictive obsession, with little grounding in honesty about a complex series of past events or in the current political realities of the Middle East. And so, I am not suggesting that grievance politics are unique to the right or that only the political right disguise grievance as political grief. There is no political monopoly upon this move. Although in recent times, it has made a great showing on the political right.

It is also striking that a politics of grievance has regularly been misrepresented in this way, *as a claim upon the legitimate entitlements associated with grief*. This is evident in Europe, in the idea that the cosmopolitanism of the EU in some way neglects the white working class, who grieve over

the loss of their country to foreign influences: refugees, bureaucrats in Brussels, bankers who happen to be Jewish. In the US, something similar is evident in the rallying around Confederate statues, in protests to defend them as a defense of the right to mourn and perhaps as a prelude to taking back some portion of what has been lost. In both cases, I will suggest that we are mostly dealing with political grievance rather than actual grief. The point is partly conceptual, a matter of what makes something grief. Yet, it is a conceptual point that is embedded in a particular context of claimed entitlements to hold onto a worrying and often racist set of symbols of the past or rather the symbols of an imagined past and a rather contrived one. In terms of the matter at hand, in the case of the Confederate statues, I will take it that it is right that they be removed and also that protests target their presence. Nothing about the importance of acknowledging the grief of others should prevent us from affirming this. Otherwise, fears about political compassion as debilitating might well be justified. It is also important *not* to treat this case as establishing some special principle, which might then lead us to ignore *genuine* cases of political grief among political opponents in other contexts. The justification for removing Confederate statues and the arguable *duty* to make sure that they are removed is not a justification for ignoring experiences of irretrievable loss which, if not handled with some sensitivity, may lead to greater harms further down the line. In other words, we should not adopt some principle that might satisfy our own anger at the expense of realizing important goals. Nor should we claim that every wrong or every great wrong is comparable to slavery, or the Holocaust, or genocide. Nor is there any clear reason to imagine that anger is an appropriate response to everything.

Suppose we hold that Black communities and persons of color are right to respond to racism and its legacies with an anger which acknowledges their experience, one that recognizes their deep personal relationship to the wrongdoing. From this, it will not follow that animal advocates are right to respond with anger. Animal advocates are not personally the victims of the great wrongs that humans inflict upon other creatures. Like other humans, they (rather *we* in my case) are complicit in the wrongs in question and complicit in ways that the people subject to racism are not complicit in racism. One response does not seem to fit everywhere. Yet, there is a danger within liberal democracies that the proliferation of dissent over a multiplicity of issues, many of which fall short of anything like the personal connection of experienced racism, may lead us to work ourselves up into a state of great indignation and to imagine a more binary world divided into friends whose rights matter and enemies whose sufferings are something to relish. A world in which one cause is much the same as any other, and warrants the same kinds of response, irrespective of the wrongs in question and irrespective of our personal connection to them.

So far, I have presupposed a distinction that I take to be important: a contrast between genuine *political grief* and mere *political grievance*. This contrast carries risks, dangers that we may allow ourselves to attribute grief to friends and mere grievance to perceived enemies. But this is not at all how I am trying to use these concepts. For the sake of clarity, I will take it that actual grief has the following features. It is a response to permanent loss and not just disappointment or rather it is a response to what is seen as permanent loss. We grieve in the context of bereavement, over people and other creatures, when we believe that someone close to us has recently died, irrespective of whether or not they have done so. A sudden reappearance following a case of mistaken identity would not nullify the genuineness of our grief up to that point. If I believed that Peter, Paul, or Martha had died, but if I bump into them in the Hilton Hotel a year later, following a bout of amnesia on their part, it will not nullify the genuineness of my grief up until that point. Also, we grieve when *things* that we care about in deep ways have been irretrievably lost, irrespective of whether or not we happen to be correct about the actual circumstances of loss. The sense of irretrievability, of the permanence of our state of loss, is bound up with the hopelessness of the desires that grief involves. Figuratively, "nothing can console us." In fact, many things do console us, but we know very well what is meant when it is said that someone is *inconsolable*. In the case of grief over the loss of a loved one, our characteristic desires can readily be set out: we want them back, but this is something that we absolutely cannot have. And an awareness that the desire cannot be satisfied shapes the experience. It demotivates, often leaving us with a sense that nothing we can do will matter, nothing will make a difference of the kind that we want our actions to make. This grief is also very different from sadness at the death of strangers or having a suspicion that someone we care for but have lost touch with is probably dead by now. I, for example, do not know whether my older brothers are alive or dead. But it seems unlikely that both will still be living. They melted into the background of the less affluent areas of London decades ago, with neither thriving. Yet, I cannot grieve on a precautionary basis, just in case one of them is no longer alive. Grief is much more concrete, a response to a more tangible set of circumstances. The fact that we may sometimes be wrong about what is going on does not remove the immediacy of our sense of loss. And what we experience is not, on the whole, voluntary. We do not *choose* grief any more than we *choose* to love, although we can do things which make both more likely to develop. We can also shape these tracts of experience with the choices that we make, just as we can shape some aspects of our passage through a dark tunnel. But that is all we can do. In the midst of the experience, we cannot suddenly will its end any more than we can will the tunnel to be full of light. We cannot close our eyes and make the darkness gone.

We also grieve, irrespective of the character of who or what is grieved over. Or, at least, this is the case *up to a point*. Beyond a certain point, it may simply become difficult to identify with an agent if they have become something terrible. They may seem too different from the person we knew and may have cared about, and this may also stand in the way of any real grief over their loss. But when it is the real thing, as it is with the loss of a loved other, the grief itself draws upon complex entanglements of desires beyond the simple desire to have our loved one return. Many ordinary desires cannot be satisfied while the grief persists. A simple desire such as the desire to have coffee once a week in a nice coffee shop while reading a book may no longer be satisfiable. This is a desire that I have and one that I am ordinarily able to satisfy. Yet, if I were to lose my wife Suzanne or if she was to become seriously unwell, I would no longer be able to satisfy the desire. The coffee would taste bitter in my mouth. My sense of ease at being with the others, without any felt need to engage in prolonged conversations with them, may be gone. Replaced, perhaps, by a sense of disconnection, of lack and absence. Of being unable to rejoin their world of ease. How can we explain this change? In part, it seems that what I really want is *not* just to have a coffee, but to do so under certain conditions which include Suzanne's well-being. The coffee desire is conditional upon a great many things which are ordinarily satisfied. Desires are typically like this. They presuppose many things that we do not comment upon but merely presuppose. They may be represented by appeal to complex conjunctions of circumstances which go far beyond the shorthand that we use when someone asks us "What do you want?" From this, a more complex understanding of genuine grief will follow. I may identify with something, but even if I do so my response to its loss or absence is not necessarily grief. It is only the real thing, only genuine grief when the relevant entanglement of desires is in place and when desires are entangled with the impossible desire to have what has been lost back again.

III Statues also die

It is tempting to think that in pressing for the removal of the Confederate statues, those who call for their removal have to deal with the political grief of people whose identities are bound up with racist practices and iconography rather than a fondness for locality and respect for their predecessors. Even if that is the case, grief over the loss of practices and iconography may be real. There is simply no rule which prevents grief concerning the loss of bad things any more than there is a rule preventing grief over the loss of bad people. The grief may still be genuine. However, the statues in question are not tied to grief in the most obvious way, that is, as commemorations of the dead. Most Confederate statues were not erected in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, but between

1890 and 1920. Not in the era of Civil War death and its memorialization, but in the succeeding era of Black disenfranchisement, segregation, and lynching, with the culmination being the eventual emergence of a more effective version of the Ku Klux Klan: modeled less upon the original than upon their portrayal in fiction, particularly D. W. Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). These statues were *not* erected as symbols of mourning for the Confederate dead, but as symbols of a resurgent supremacy, erected in the hope and belief in the continuing possibility of a white domination over a massive and subdued Black population, as a celebration of practices of domination which had not passed away. They were not lost and gone forever. They were not, as earlier war memorials had tended to be, constructed for the graveyard, but for public squares, college campuses, and the front of civil buildings, even if the occasional use of obelisks echoed earlier funerary commemorative practice. A typical example would be the mounted officer with an inscription justifying the Lost Cause or suggesting that history would eventually come around to sympathy for it.

F. Sheffield Hale, of the Atlanta History Centre, notes: "An equestrian statue of a confederate general is not an expression of personal loss" (Hale 2016: 20). And here, we do know what actual expressions of loss in relation to the Civil War look like. There are enough monuments of the latter sort for us to tell the difference:

> Immediately after the war, the sense of shock and grief among many white southerners was profound. At least one fifth of all white men of military age in the Confederacy died during the war. From the 1860s through the 1880s, most monuments were erected to commemorate Confederate dead.
>
> (Hale 2016: 20)

We may argue about the precise dating of the change and the point at which commemoration of the dead was reshaped into the idea of the Lost Cause. It is also worth noting that the public meanings of the memorials of the earlier commemorative phase have themselves been reshaped by subsequent events and by the later proliferation of Lost Cause memorials promising that an imagined South would eventually rise again. A South, again, at odds with non-white Southerners. Hale's position on the problem is interesting, in the sense that it is close to the action rather than a senatorial overview and also because it shifted and tracked a broader and quite recent change of attitudes. From an earlier starting point of arguing for retention during the first wave of removals in 2017, so long as statues could be contextualized to help people understand their clear and dangerous white supremacist origins, Hale shifted toward removal during the second wave from 2020 onwards. Yet, the shift did not involve abandonment of the belief that the removal of memorials to the

museum and the storehouse is almost always something that diminishes us, leaves us with a poorer public domain in which a grasp of the past becomes less accessible.

The removal of statues gathered pace in an uneven manner from 2017 to 2020 under the impact of public protest, demonstration, and arguments in local legislatures. Iconography celebrating racism and associating public identities with the wrong side in the Civil War was a long-standing issue, given a special focus and momentum through the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and through the waves of BLM protests in these two years. It is tempting to think of their removal as part of a broader process of decolonization, particularly given the popularity of the latter concept in recent years. Many commenters make this move in spite of the problematic nature of a slippage between plausible versions in which we must deal with legacies of colonialism and less plausible versions in which normalized liberal democracies are still essentially colonial states or colonial settler states. It is not clear that normalized liberal democracies are essentially anything other than clusters of institutions, practices, and power relations which often shift too slowly. The temptation to think of matters in these terms stems in part from the fact that statue removal *was* a prominent feature of a genuine decolonization process on an international scale after the Second World War, when there was still an extensive but rapidly declining system of colonial political rule. A final reckoning for many public monuments within liberal democracies occurred in the 1950s. In France, during a postwar decade which was better known for the revocation of censorship laws concerning film and newspapers, the prizewinning documentary *Les statues meurent aussi (Statues also Die)* (1953) by Resnais, Marker, and Cloquet had its second half banned, when it took the legacy of colonialism to task for the way it had shaped perceptions of public monuments and African art. Similarly, in Dublin, The Spire, standing at around 121 meters tall, is one of the best navigation sites for getting around the city. However, a statue of the British naval commander Lord Nelson previously stood there, above Sackville Street and on top of a great column, from 1808 all the way through to 1966, when it was finally blown up by republicans. The Irish Army then finished the job, amid no public great enthusiasm for uncovering and prosecuting the culprits. This was not simply removal (which could possibly be reversed), but a final reckoning. Comparable measures in the US would be melting down rather than relocation to storage or to a museum as artefacts of a troubled past.

Statuary celebrating a disreputable past is a long-standing problem of public space within liberal democracies whose roots are to be found in systems of colonial oppression as much as they are within internal processes of political dissent and transformation. Often, these legacies are integral to histories as false as the Lost Cause, Whig histories in which brutality and intolerance of religious discrimination and fanaticism

which ranges from the prohibition of Christmas and the misrepresentation of religious compromise through to the burning of witches, are rewritten into the only and necessary path toward a modern liberal democratic state. Earlier wrongs are justified by appeal to later public goods. For example, the English parliament has a statue of Oliver Cromwell outside, in spite of his horrific war crimes, involvement in ethnic cleansing, pioneering of Colonialism, and the systematic subjection of the smaller neighboring nations. Interestingly, he is an icon for the left in England more than he is an icon for the political right. An important part of the tradition of Protestant dissent to which social democracy in England traces its origins, often without any great awareness that it is appealing only to Protestant traditions as part of a process of the making of an English working class (Thompson 1968). It seems that no one on any side has a monopoly on sanitized histories. But of course, statues are not pulled down in the name of good history or in the name of fact checking the record. They are pulled down because of what they are taken to represent and to encourage.

Should we then try to strip out all reactionary and offensive iconography of this sort from public life? Posed in these terms, the distinctiveness of place is glossed over, with the removal of statues in Bristol, England, looking much the same as their removal in Virginia. A little more precisely, we might ask: "Should reactionary statues, flags and emblems such as the Southern Cross/Confederate Flag be retired to museums and exhibitions rather than standing, or flying, in parks and in front of focal points for political power?" The answer to this would seem to be an unqualified "yes." But it may still be a "yes" which acknowledges certain ambiguities. As before, the "we" in question is not clear. It might be states, or groups of agents exerting pressure through protest, or both. There is also no time indexing. Is the thought that we should have the removal take place *now*, or *at some point* in the future, or that it should have been done years ago? Finally, there is an appeal to what is reactionary, a formulation which may not work easily or appeal to a consensus. After all, we may also regard various political parties as reactionary, yet accept that they have a perfectly good entitlement to representation and to a public presence within liberal democracies. We may expect agreement over the pulling down of the statue of a man who defended slavery and brutally slaughtered Black captives, but it is less obvious that we will reach any agreement on who or what counts as reactionary. Nor would it necessarily be a good thing if everyone was in agreement about the concept. It is not the kind of thing that we obviously *need*, in the same sense that we might *need* statues to come down. Yet, some contrast between liberal and conservative or progressive and reactionary is always part and parcel of how democratic politics work, and it will not do much good to shift the weight from an idea of what is reactionary to an idea of what is offensive. Perhaps there are certain kinds of offense which the

state ought to prevent and whose prevention ought also to be a matter for protest. Marches routed through areas as a statement of territorial claim of majorities upon the neighborhoods where minorities live look like a good example. But the simple fact that something is offensive is not always on its own a sufficient reason for its removal from the liberal democratic public sphere. Otherwise, any one of us might draw up lists of the offensive statues in town squares and present them to the relevant authorities in an expectation of removal. Agreement upon action need not presuppose agreement about everything else, even if we want to establish some clear shared public standard that might generate a rule to determine what should be done and what should be removed.

We may, for example, admire John Stuart Mill's liberal harm principle that agents should be free to do what they want unless it actually harms others (Mill 2000). But we tend to be more cautious about the idea of an offense principal, even though liberally minded agents have argued for this too. The American political and legal philosopher Joel Feinberg is a case in point. Feinberg claimed some decades ago that "the prevention of offensive conduct is properly the state's business" (Feinberg 1985: 1). Not in the sense that offense could always be legislated against, but in the more limited sense that it always counts as a reason to legislate. One reason among others, with various weightings. This may be hard to square with freedom of speech and diversity, with a world in which many people are apt to take offense, with or without good reason. A world in which the giving of offense may even have a certain cachet and political significance. There are, no doubt, many people who will be offended by things that I say and do. The attitude taken toward the Union of the four nations into Britain at the start of this chapter will be offensive to some, but not, I hope, intentionally offensive. The comments on Cromwell and the left in England may also offend and perhaps they may offend some of the same people, no matter how accessible the historical record of brutalities happens to be. Offense may be given over these things without any intention to offend, just as some people may be offend by open homosexuality, by the sheer existence of transsexuals, by public practices which violate a familiar and optional construction of Christian sexual norms, by the use of Gaelic in public or dual language signs, or by changes to the name and logo of a favorite football team. Harm is generally to be avoided, and it is often good to avoid deliberately offending, but offense does not create a presupposition that any wrong has been done. And because of this, it is difficult to regard it as a reason to legislate in the way that Feinberg does rather than a side requirement for certain kinds of legislation on incitement and hate speech. The prospect of offense, on its own and separate from such matters, may even be a reason to perform certain actions, so that toxic attitudes are drawn closer to the surface where they may be harder to ignore. There is a place for offense, for shock, for incivility, and for "uncivil disobedience," as Candice Delmas (2018) puts matters.

This is especially clear when the sense of offense is itself grounded in prejudice. Here, I am thinking especially about the public and official use of minority and Indigenous languages, which often face denials of hostility coupled with strong and patently hostile reactions when such languages are given official standing as the languages of a section of the political community. But we might think more generally of the swing in recent times *against* multiculturalism, a shift present across the political spectrum from right to left. We can imagine a political agent who, during the battles of the Corbyn movement in the UK against acknowledgment of a distinctive problem of antisemitism within the Labour Party, might post the Magen David on Facebook at the time of a suitable Jewish celebration to allow friends to see the offended reactions that it draws. Or, more provocatively, they might post comments by Martin Luther King in support of Israel's right to exist. (King supported Israel, Gandhi opposed it on the basis of a preference for decolonialization to proceed through the formation of unitary states, even at the risk of political domination by the largest ethnic group.) Citing King in this way without asserting that he would have changed his mind would be a provocative move.

Looking for some strong reaction would be in keeping with King's own approach. The Civil Rights Movement under his leadership repeatedly broke the norms of segregation in a deliberately offensive way. It did not avoid the giving of offense, but tried to offend specifically racist sensibilities and tried to focus upon doing so in some ways rather than others. All offense is not equal, in terms of its justifiability and role. Opponents of King and the Civil Rights movement, by contrast, tried to blur all giving of offense together, as if offense to traditions was the same as shouting obscenities in front of a church. Democratic Party supporters in the South, such as the pro-segregation populist Lester Maddox, *were* offended and made it clear that they were offended by the actions of the movement. Offense in politics, up to and including incivility, can often be entirely justified. Perhaps even *required* on pain of a moral failing. Those who refuse to offend some agents, may fail to defend others in ways that they deserve. This, again, answers to the opening concern of the chapter. That a sense of opponents as humans might lessen our practical commitment to see wrongs ended and entitlements asserted.

So, let us think not in terms of offense, but in terms of *what agents are owed*, as humans or as citizens. This is a concept whose use has been revived within philosophical discussion by T. M. Scanlon in *What We Owe to Each Other* (1998) within a framework of contractual ethics, where the analogy with commerce was perhaps closer than anything that I have in mind here. I would perhaps be more ready to surrender the analogy for some rival with less of a contractual sound. But this too may be a residual influence of social democracy and its wariness about anything that sounds like the relations of the marketplace. Be that as it may, it is almost a platitude to say that we are not owed freedom from offense, or

at least not from every kind of offense. And we are not owed freedom from the presence of opposing views, imagery, and memorials which may happen to be more conservative or judged more reactionary than our own preferred views, imagery, and memorials. What we and others *are* owed is a complex matter, but often involves various kinds of respect. Respect is more of an attitude than a principle in the sense of something rule-like or immediately action-guiding. To say "we ought to be respectful of others" tells us little about how this might be accomplished, and little about whose idea of what is respectful might be in play, ours or theirs. Opponents of transsexual identities, who appeal to special sorts of religious prohibitions and requirements, no doubt believe that they are being respectful in their denial of the legitimacy of such identities and in their denial of the equal sets of entitlements claimed. It is doubtful that others regard their criticisms in the same light. And what is in play here does not seem to be only the regular lack of action-guidingness that all principles have, but the fact that multiple principles, norms, values, and so on are built into respect as an attitude and built into the showing of respect as a practice.

The left's difficulties with the concept have an obvious source. Respect is something difficult to place in relation to enemies, especially class enemies, and seemingly redundant within the ranks of friends where solidarity does the required work. The concept is, however, at the core of the liberal tradition, at the heart of writings by Kant and Mill, and it has framed a good deal of civil disobedience discourse and Black activism. It is tempting to say that it is at the heart of liberal democracy itself, thought of as a way of expressing a commitment to values and not just a special procedure for choosing governments. What we are each owed as citizens is respect when it comes to activities in the public domain, such as the siting of objects. This applies even if there is a case for toleration of the objects in question. Consider the Union Flag (previously the "Union Jack") of the UK. An emblem which *did* fly over slave ships before flying over ships involved in the suppression of the slave trade. It means one thing in Eire and Scotland. Something controversial, but it can carry a different and more nostalgic set of associations in London connected to tourism rather than to a Protestant unionist ascendancy within the state. However, if it is regularly flown at town halls and institutional sites in the smaller nations, places where *both* Catholic and Protestant are supposed to be represented, the context raises concerns about respect. However, such questions are then resolved through appeals to toleration, removal, or supplementation; these questions are at least raised because citizens are ordinarily owed respect. When the problem of removal and restriction is reformulated in these terms, it looks more plausible to say that there may well be a duty to remove certain kinds of disrespectful iconography or to banish them permanently to the museum or to some other location. Tracking the offense which is given can shape how we deal with

the question without the problem itself being formulated primarily in terms of offense. As with the flying of the Union Flag, context can make a difference. A bust of Gandhi without his glasses sits in Luxembourg's Parc Municipal where it is most likely to be seen as an anti-colonialist symbol of resistance and reconciliation. However, a similar bust outside an African embassy or in the middle of a South African town might genuinely be offensive and possibly disrespectful, given Gandhi's prejudices against the Black South African population. His strategy in South Africa was heavily influenced by his time in social democratic circles in London and depended upon presenting the Indian population as morally upright and dependable, unlike the blacks (Gandhi 2001). His own engagement with dissent was hardly a seamless garment across time. Colonialist influences were still clearly present in his thought even as late as *Hind Swaraj* (Gandhi 2011), but the South African campaign is where they were most evident.

This case of Gandhi statues has a special relevance because of arguments from the political right that Confederate statue removal is in some way analogous and would lead to an absurd slippery slope on which no public imagery would be safe. Everything would eventually fall, with community and respect for the past undermined. Monuments do not confer sainthood, and saints too often turn out to be less than saintly once we drill down into the details of their lives. No publicly celebrated figure or cause will be safe. There is, however, a significant difference between saying that a symbol of respect may misfire if placed in the wrong context, and claiming that statues and emblems geared to the celebration of an oppressive political ascendancy can themselves be adequately respectful of all sections of the political community. In the one case, respect misfires. In the other, it was never there to begin with. What is owed was never fully grasped. Moreover, there seems nothing greatly problematic about accepting that statues also die or rather they outlive their usefulness. Unless we imagine that political communities are held together by some deep historical past rather than by the stories we tell about the past, there will be no problem.

Overall, I will take it that we may well have a standing duty to remove statues whose presence involves public disrespect for minorities and historically oppressed groups. That this would not simply be a good thing to do, but something that we have an actual obligation to do. Those who engage in the more organized and cohesive forms of dissent may well have a duty not to dismiss the significance of iconography in favor of a focus upon wage levels or some or other upcoming election. There may well be an obligation to lobby and protest. Helen Frowe (2019: 28) locates the duty concerning removal in the state, which has a defeasible "duty to condemn and repudiate serious wrongdoing." Defeasible because lesser evil considerations apply and because most duties are like this, that is, constrained by a requirement to make matters better and not

worse. However, state duties often go with duties of other sorts, obligations which are spread around among ordinary agents: a duty of states to remove go with duties of historically dominant groups to accept removal, political parties to support removal, and activists to target certain objects for removal. This still leaves the question of *when* an open one, with the possibility that the task may fall to another generation. Yet, deferral can also be problematic; justice deferred is justice denied and respect deferred is respect denied. The appeal for patience on the part of an oppressed or disadvantaged group may involve a continuing perception that *they* and not the prejudiced or privileged majority are the more immediate problem. That *they* are the ones who need to compromise. In a biographical documentary *James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket* (1989), the Black activist novelist James Baldwin responded forcefully to such appeals:

> I was born here almost 60 years ago. I'm not gonna live another 60 years. You always told me 'it takes time.' It's taken my father's time, my mother's time, my uncle's time, my brother's and sister's time, my niece's and my nephew's time. How much time do you want for your progress?

The problem is then pushed back to where it belongs. How much time does anyone need to stop being racist, or homophobic, or transphobic, or mired in the lost causes of empire or of slavery? Yet, there remains a question about how those who want to move on from such legacies should act and when they should do so. Deferral in the face of moral failures to fully recognize a common humanity and the multiple ways of being human may require a timeline, a realistic idea of how matters might be moved forwards and not only delayed. Otherwise, we are in a territory where consoling doublethink may take hold, notional opposition coupled with *de facto* acceptance, a little like the notional opposition of social democracy to monarchy which rarely spilled over into any actual moment against this iconic institution.

Deferral is not, however, always the covert form of acceptance that James Baldwin was highlighting. There are genuinely transitional episodes in which societies move from one thing to another, and there are practical questions about how this may be done. The Irish Free State (now *Eire* [the Republic of Ireland]) was founded in 1922, following mass republican dissident and a popular attempt at insurrection against the British Crown focused upon the seizure of the Post Office on O'Connell Street in Dublin in 1916. Eventual state formation for Eire occurred on terms that the British did not like but were ready to agree to and did *not* involve a full national equality. State formation involved multiple compromises, the most obvious of which was partition and Britain's retention of a redefined Ulster in the North. The newly independent state itself remained notionally part of the colonial system through the

Commonwealth, and through the latter, it remained notionally subject to the British monarch. It was not until considerably later that this ended, with the breaking point something of a dispute. The 1937 constitution, bringing Eire officially into existence, did not deal explicitly with these controversial matters, allowing the British government to continue to press a claim of dominion which was not fully and explicitly rejected by unilateral Irish legislation until the end of 1948, at which point Eire was officially a republic. The Republic did not formally become an actual republic until a generational shift had eroded residual identification with Britain, the monarchy, the Union, and the trappings of colonialism. But what eroded at the same time was any hope for a rapid reunification of Ireland, a prospect which had previously given grounds for caution. Public statues and monuments celebrating Britain and the Empire were also kept in place long after the new state had finally made an official break. The Nelson monument on Sackville Street was not blown up beyond repair until 1966, some 44 years after state formation. The statue took a long time to die, and not because its continuing presence was regarded as trivial or only a symbolic matter. Controversy raged for decades because the statue was bound up with civic identity, even though it was in tension with the prevailing national identity.

IV Patterns of justification and false grief

When it comes to the removal of public iconography and protests calling for immediate removal, there seems to be no fixed principle which might settle issues of timing and pace. In the Eire case, the grief of loss for citizens identifying as British was taken into account long after the battles over state formation took place. But from this, we cannot fix appropriate timing and pace for the US case in which the extremity of wrong was far greater. Yet, the wrongs in the Irish case were still extreme: famine, extrajudicial killings, military occupation, and the attempt to eliminate significant elements of Irish culture. Even so, racism as a direct legacy of slavery touches upon one of the great moral evils of the past millennium. The very extremity of the wrong makes it difficult to argue that the removal of racist iconography was untimely or in some way premature. But even if we accept this, some questions remain unanswered. Was it right to press for an immediate removal of these statues *solely* because of what they represented (the representational reason) or because of their continuing use as a rallying point (the instrumental reason)? It is tempting to say "both." The risks of leaving rallying points is a classic political rationale for following Machiavelli's advice and carrying out all of one's most far-reaching measures as quickly as possible whenever they become possible. The consolidation of a new reality can make it important to leave opponents no possibility of reversal. The most extreme historic case is the killing of monarchs and even their closest relations in order to ensure

that restoration cannot occur. A measure that succeeded in Russia, but not in England or France. Nothing of that level of extremity is involved in shifting statues from parks into museums and warehouses or symbolically melting them down for other and better purposes, a shape-shifting or transformation of base metals into something serviceable.

This question of rationale and the reasons for removing statues is about *avoiding convenient but flawed justifications*. And even if we say that the reasons include what they represent and their use as a rallying point, we may still try to make sense of which of these reasons is doing the heavy lifting. Often, it may seem to be the second reason, the instrumental reason that public iconography of this sort is too dangerous to keep around. This is not because symbolism matters less than how public symbols are used. We cannot reasonably be indifferent to what monuments of any sort represent and focus only upon how they are used. A statue of cheerful Klansmen lynching a Black man would be so directly disrespectful that the question of whether or not it was used as a symbolic rallying point for racists could involve one thought too many. As if the sheer fact of the brutal subject matter was not sufficient on its own to warrant *immediate* removal. However, symbolism and statues are rarely so direct. They typically present images of bravery and not brutality. Avuncular generals on horseback who have sacrificed domestic bliss for boots and saddles. Yet, there are plausible reasons for caution about placing too much weight upon an appeal to the sheer representational features of the statues themselves, irrespective of the context of continuing wrongs and which wrongs, in particular, happened to toxify the political domain during the Trump presidency when a major wave of statue removal began. After all, there are lots of legacies of terrible things in the public domain. This is *not* the point that other bad things justify this bad thing, but rather that when surrounded on all sides with terrible imagery, there may be little alternative but to prioritize what we change. It may even make sense to keep some terrible things around in order to be reminded about what we are capable of, as a warning from history. This is part of Hale's point about losing something from the public domain when statuary is removed, even when there are good reasons for its removal.

Two further qualifications are worth bearing in mind. *First*, there is a difference between an appeal to grief that might be experienced by political opponents over an issue of this sort and an appeal to magnanimity. A recognition of the entitlement of opponents to grieve over their losses can be based upon a sense of equality, a sense of shared humanity. Magnanimity sounds more like the superiority of victors shaping a response to the defeated. *Second*, an appeal to grief and to the entitlement to grieve as a reason for delay or for removing without any great celebration only makes sense under actual circumstances of loss *for those concerned*. When those defending icons remain ascendant, the same case cannot be made, even if they appeal to some imagined loss (the Lost Cause) which

places a still ascendant group in the position of imaginary victims. Fear of others who are not white is not the same as grief. A contrived sense of loss is not the same as actual grief. Otherwise, most of us would all be in a permanent state of grief over something or other: lost youth, lost hopes, lost motor vehicles, and defeats in sporting events. Disappointments do not generally result in anything comparable to bereavement and the experience of void that we go through when those we love are gone, never to return.

Yet, even in the light of these things, we may still worry about conceding too much. Does it *ever* really make sense to speak of grief in the case of agents who are prejudiced and sometimes obviously so? Or is this just a way to lend depth and grandeur to attachments of some shallow sort? Attachments which in any case involve moral failings? Here, I want to say that the failings may be real, but the depth of loss may also be real and not borrowed. Racists and bigots may feel as deeply as we do, and not just as intensely as we do. Which is not to say that their feelings are the only consideration or that they are ever the main consideration. Those who suffer the results of prejudice have priority over the hurt feelings of the prejudiced. But this does not mean that we can always or usually afford to ignore the grief of prejudiced agents. Even on pragmatic grounds, the dangers of opponent grief need to be gauged. Confederate mourning in the 19th century is a prime example. Personal and political grief following the Civil War fed the fear and resentment that rapidly overwhelmed the brief triumph of more egalitarian visions, plunging the South into a century and a half of violence and domination, our best images for which are equestrian men with hoods and a longing to kill. The depth of grief, whether personal or political or a potent combination of both, is too dangerous to set aside in the hope that everything may be tackled by rational deliberation in the public sphere. As if racism could be ended through a particularly well-executed debate.

What counts strongly against delay out of respect for grief in the case of the removal of Confederate statues is the dubious standing of the claims of grief. Real grief is a process, not an episode. We may be angry between morning and afternoon, but not in the evening. Grief is not like this. We do not blame agents for grieving over the loss of others, irrespective of who these others were, because grief has to be worked through. There is no way to get to the other side except by working through it. Similarly, we may blame others for identifying with bad causes, but it makes little sense to blame them for grieving over loss when the cause they identify with body and soul has been irretrievably lost. We also accommodate the grief of some of the worst of agents and those close to them, releasing people from prison, allowing their participation in funerals, and so on. Even if I approved of capital punishment as a normal legal punishment (which I do not), I would not approve of killing someone on the day before the funeral of a parent. We do not have to like those to whom we

extend compassion, but a failure to extend it can say something disturbing about who we really are.

Some of the features of grief just mentioned do look like they fit the contrived Lost Cause of the Confederacy. But this should not be surprising. The very idea of the Lost Cause as a late 19th-century distillation of grievances has been geared and shaped to our regular understanding of what grief is. And to our sense that there may be a set of entitlements which entirely sidestep the issue of slavery for which the Confederacy stood and which it enshrined in its constitution as the only part of the latter that was both distinctive and transcended its conception of state rights. The Confederate constitution did not, after all, enshrine an absolute conception of such rights, but included its own constraining of state entitlements, based around a required acknowledgment of the rights of slave owners, even if they came from other states. No state had a right to override the slave owner's property claim, irrespective of the views of its electors. The Lost Cause narrative fits poorly with the Confederate constitution. The way in which the Lost Cause narrative emerged and the ways in which it has been used allow us to build a picture of false grief, by which I mean the plausible imitation of grief which occurs when the desire at the heart of what is felt is not actually a longing for what has been lost, but a desire for something else (Milligan 2008). Few people beyond the fringes of neo-Nazi organizations have any notion of what a system of agrarian slavery would look like if restored in 21st-century Virginia or what a new Confederate government would look like if one was set up in Richmond. They do not want the thing which is gone to return. They want a different thing with a similar enshrining of white superiority. Yet, there is the appearance of real grief, of wanting to restore and return.

This is not unprecedented. At a large-scale level, we may think of the waves of grief following the death of some public figure such as Princess Diana or Pope John Paul II. While some of the grief in these cases was genuine, the grief among those closest to the people in question, the extent of mass mourning stretched to many agents who clearly had no particularly strong prior connection or even a history of great admiration. Yet, they were caught up in the process, including opponents of monarchy and militant secularists who happened to be in Rome at the right time. Not to feel something, not to be caught up in the moment on a visit to St Peters Basilica would have been odd. But what such agents wanted above all was to be part of the popular wave. Not to be excluded from the excitement and the sense of belonging and of sharing that it offered. And, of course, many had real reasons for grief, but not about the dead pope or the dead princess, and this was an occasion which brought this real sense of loss to the fore. Each new loss brings back the losses that have gone before. False grief for one person may involve genuine grief for another. And this is different from saying that the apparent grief was "faked up" in either of these cases. Or that the agents in question were simply pretending. False grief of this sort

can seem utterly convincing to those who experience it. It can seem very like the same thing, if only briefly and in the moment. The felt, affective, dimension can be similar. But false grief fades quickly, and it does not poison one's everyday existence in the way that genuine grief does. The cappuccino at the corner shop may still taste as good, the focaccia may remain every bit as light and satisfying. Similarly, in the case of the Lost Cause and the associated Confederate statuary of later 19th and early 20th century, these were not primarily about the dead or about a desire to bring back and reconstitute the Confederacy. Rather, the desires involved do seem to have concerned the wrong object for it to be the actual grief that Lost Cause mythologies have typically posited. Instead, we may draw attention to desires to commandeer and keep hold of public space as white controlled, and to keep history identified with white history rather than the history of blacks or the history of any other section of the political community.

There is, admittedly, a risk here in appealing to false grief. The risk of dismissing any actual grief that we do not like. But it would take a good deal to show that this danger was greater or deserved more attention than the risks of deferring justice. In the case of Unionism in Eire, the loss does seem to have been the real thing. If Scotland goes independent, there would no doubt be something similar to deal with, the genuine political grief of unionists, and supporters of Scotland's independence may need to accommodate this. No doubt, the sense of loss experienced by white Southerners immediately following the Civil War was just as real as the loss felt by Eire's unionists. We can readily accept the genuineness of the grief which led to cemetery memorialization immediately after the War, while pointing out that it is a grief long gone. One which no longer stands in any need of memorialization, and certainly not the presence of memorials in front of town halls or inside the buildings where legislation for all is passed. Nor must we deny that some agents genuinely do grieve for the loss of a white identity that they actually do associate with the Confederacy. There really does seem to be some people who imagine that the South will rise again complete with a race war and the trappings of 19th-century racism. That there will be a new Confederacy. This is, however, different from the Lost Cause in its more familiar and extensively present forms. The cause, like the Confederate dead, will not rise. Such ideas seem remote from most of the agents who identify with Confederate imagery, such as those who marched at Charlotte in 2017. And this is partly because white identity has not actually been lost. It has been reconstituted, as all identities are over time, in ways that make an actual return of what is gone unintelligible.

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7 Between Politics and Love

I The awkwardness and naturalness of talk about love

Throughout this text, I have tried to tease out the idea of approaching dissent with a compassionate sensibility rather than dividing up the political world into friends and enemies. Here, I want to deepen this idea through consideration of the role that the concept of love can play within political life, especially through the motivating love of humanity. Without something along these lines, the motivation of a good deal of activism, protest, and dissent will be hard to understand. In making this move, I echo philosophers such as Simone Weil (2002) and Raimond Gaita (2002, 2004), but also dissenting authors such as James Baldwin for whom humanity sat at the most important level of our identity, while love was a growing up that does not begin and end where we think: "Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within." Baldwin's concern with love was not a matter of being nice. It was a concern with those matters which run deepest within a human life. Racial tensions in America were, in his view, "rooted in the very same depths as those from which love springs, or murder" (Baldwin 1998: 341). Love makes us capable of great and terrible things. Both rather than one to the exclusion of the other. Nor does it abide by the rules and prerogatives of an approved heterosexuality or some imagined ideal of family values. Love transgressed and continues to transgress the norms by which we are supposed to live.

Participation in dissent may lead us to feel that the friends and enemies discourse grasps a harsh truth. After all, it sets us *against* something and *against* those who uphold the something that we oppose. In a sense, dividing the world into friends and enemies is a way of continuing the legacy of social democracy, a way of remaining within its shadow long after its major organizational expressions have gone into decline. Within social democracy, *the many* may be joined by solidarity, which is a kind of utility friendship, while *the few* are cast in the role of enemies. Although in practice it may be more common for enemies to proliferate to the point where they outnumber "true" friends. Accumulated enemies may include those who favor significantly different strategies, or have

DOI: 10.4324/9780429022524-8

different priorities, or who rally behind causes whose force we do not ourselves feel: gender equality, animal rights, the equality of nations. An imagined political world so divided is a way of seeing things that may well make sense within totalitarian systems, or under dictatorships, or in places where the powerful do not merely dominate but also brutalize the weak. There are places where enemies are real, and there can be real enemies even within liberal democracies: actual fascists, those in the tradition of the Ku Klux Klan, or America's racist and dangerously armed militias (Kutner 2020). But most political agents are not like that, at least for now. For the time being, once we direct our gaze away from the sound and fury of party affiliation or loyalty to some particular campaign, the idea of opponents as, for the most part, enemies is harder to place within liberal democracies. At least within their internal politics.

A compassionate political sensibility is not however a political theory, and least of all is it an appeal to the most familiar way of politicizing love. That is, the version that we find in Gandhi (Milligan 2014). A politicization which asks love to win over the hearts of opponents and thereby asks it to do too much work. The painful recognition that an exaggerated hostility to others is an unhelpful or toxic legacy need not lead us to believe as Gandhi did that the suffering of protestors must gradually melt the hearts of those who defend some status quo. A point pressed forcefully in analytic treatments of his writings, for example, the axiomatization of Gandhi's ethic by Arne Naess (1974). The intricacies of Gandhi's use of language are well commented upon (Suhrud 2012), and the risks of mistranslation fall into the territory covered in a previous chapter on *ahimsa*. However, there are certain troubling features such as an ethic of personal sacrifice and appeal to the heart of the other that stand out without too much ambiguity. Gandhi's concept of *satyagraha*, the idea of a sacrificial political agency, may help us to identify an important conceptual niche space for a "more than civil disobedience" form of nonviolent protest. But its underlying commitment to the loving power of truth, if only the love of those who protest is itself pure enough, seems implausible. It is also liable to generate misplaced explanations of why protests fail. Bad strategy and overpowering opponents are often more important than personal impurity. Nonetheless, personal purification is an interesting political phenomenon, even if it is not an especially reliable pathway to political change. It can integrate well into some of the most admirable forms of dissent. It is often and deliberately encouraged within environmental protest and animal rights activism. In the previous century, it was a recurring feature of peace movements, such as the Christian-led, antinuclear movements of the 1950s and the 1980s. Contemporary anti-war movements, by contrast, tend to push personal transformation agendas out toward their edges.

These Gandhian ideas of *satyagraha* and personal purification are heavily entwined with Gandhi's metaphysics. They constitute a different

level of explanation from his simpler and more reliable insight that *those who engage in the best and most admirable forms of dissent are not usually better people than their opponents*. We are, instead, just different waves on the same sea. When you or I protest, we are not part of an army of the virtuous waging war against the immoral and the morally weak. Virtue and weakness are not distributed in that way. They do not map well onto our political commitments, with the exception of the very worst of commitments which are held by the very worst sorts of people. By which, I do not mean those who hold disagreeable views about taxation or about public spending levels. For the most part, political agents are ordinary agents, irrespective of the multiple alignments that they (or rather *we*) adopt. Only in rare cases do those who engage in dissent become closer to political saints, and even when they do so, they are likely to remain all too human in their personal lives. This aspect of an appeal to a compassionate sensibility may have practical, moral, and epistemic significance, irrespective of whether it is couched in Gandhian language or in terms more familiar within the routine of liberal democracy. Movements may sometimes perform better if their participants are less deluded about their own moral accomplishments, and a compassionate sensibility toward opponents may help any of us to remain open to the idea of a shared humanity that underlies political differences and open also to the difficult idea that there are places and lives within which love and dissent meet.

In this chapter, I will try to tease out these two ideas in more detail, in the hope that doing so may further blunt the appeal of a more binary friend/enemy approach. Two provisional clarifications may help to accomplish this task. The first is that an appeal to a shared humanity need not be anthropocentric prejudice. It need not presuppose any special claim that humans are intrinsically more valuable than nonhumans. The multiple scattered comments about our humanity and the human in the previous chapters have not been underpinned by any claim at all about special intrinsic standing or the idea that we alone are the most truly lovable thing in the universe. The second is that the aim of bringing love and dissent closer together does not involve the naïve idea that friend/enemy thinking can actually be removed from political conflict, especially in its more popular, direct, and emotionally charged forms. Politics may not presuppose any standing binary division between friends and enemies, but many forms of dissent (from large-scale strikes to protests over entrenched right-wing governments) still generate transitory friend/enemy relations, and they still encourage us to think of the world as continuously divided in this way. There is also no reasonable prospect of a purified mass dissent in which all such binary and hostile thinking might be avoided. The thought is only that reflection upon the places where love and politics meet may make it easier to accept what we share with those we oppose and to accept the limitations of *we* and *they*.

Once we look away from the traditions of social democracy and away also from industrial militancy, we can see that the idea of love is a recurring and under-acknowledged reference point for those who engage in dissent. Gandhi, and before him Tolstoy, did not arbitrarily seize upon love as a political concept. Nor did they merely translate and overextend some loving Pauline Christianity in an implausible and naïve way. The concept of love has a naturalness which does not go away. When David Graeber, one of the best-known voices to emerge out of the Occupy movements of 2011, wrote his retrospective on the occupation of Zucotti Park in New York, he described it as:

> a community without money, based on principles not just of democracy but of mutual caring, solidarity, and support…It was the ultimate blow not just against Wall Street, but against that very principle of cynicism of which it was the ultimate embodiment. At least for that brief moment, love had become the ultimate revolutionary act.
>
> (Graeber 2013: 127)

There are respects in which we may be inclined to challenge Graeber's claim. The reversion to a language of principles sounds a little misplaced. And a hard-headed political realism may lead us to say that the moment in question was a very brief one. The protestors are gone, but Wall Street remains. Yet, even if we think along these lines, it will not negate the point that talk of this sort seems to arise naturally *within* dissent itself. It is not something which is brought from the outside in the way that Lenin once thought that socialist consciousness had to be brought to the working class from some other social group. Nor is attention to the naturalness of talk about love necessarily a way to moralize political movements. Many of the key participants at Zucotti were agents with a longer experience of anti-capitalist protest. Many were influenced by anarchism and by Murray Bookchin's writings about local forms of direct democracy (Bookchin 2015). The language of love was not a fixed and obvious point of appeal within their political traditions. Nonetheless, the appeal was made, not in a forced way, but as a way of contrasting the uplifting experience of the occupation with the legacies of injustice, prejudice, and exclusion. Appeals to love can operate as a marker which says that *we strive to be different from that which we oppose*. This much seems to be one of the most common features of talk about love that emerges from within dissent. Again, to draw upon the Gandhian case, one of Gandhi's main concepts of loving dissent, *sarvodya*, was a neologism with Sanskrit roots, *sarva*, meaning all, every, or the whole, and *udaya*, meaning rising or sunrise (Varma 1959). The experience of dissent can be uplifting, if it is the right kind of dissent for the moment, involving the right agents and in the right way. To Graeber, and perhaps to other participants also, the

occupation of Zuccotti Park seems to have been a little like that, at least in its early stages. Conveying a sense of its atmosphere by reference to the most uplifting human experience of all, love, has a naturalness.

By contrast with this thought, Marxism has generally represented political struggle in other and more instrumental terms. As a sort of military conflict. Complete with quotes from Clausewitz to the effect that war is a continuation of politics by other means. James Baldwin sometimes speaks of love in similar terms, but as a way to stress the harshness of love. Marxists draw upon war analogies in ways closer to the literal, tending to draw something out of Clausewitz which is not entirely there, that is, a reversal of the phrase so that politics itself becomes a kind of war, or analogous to war, or that "the highest form of the class struggle is civil war" (Trotsky 1973: 26). Those Marxists who have tried to find a place for love such as Joseph Dietzgen and the Bolsheviks Alexandra Kollontai, Alexander Bogdanov, and Yevgeny Zamyatin also struggled to place it within this framework. Dietzgen echoed Feuerbach in treating true love as part of a critique of Christianity, but the appeal to love was occasional and formulated as love for the human species with more than a sprinkling of misogyny and routine 19th-century racial discourse (Dietzgen 1917: 109, 157). Kollontai (1977, 1999) and Bogdanov (1984) pursued the matter in fiction, through the rather different theme of personal love among comrades (but never across class lines), as a way of breaking apart bourgeois norms of monogamous sexuality. At times, in their texts, political loyalties seem to be a measure of how much personal loyalty others may deserve. In their fictions, central characters struggle to find another whose commitment is equal to their own.

To get more realistic about love, it may well be that we have to be more personal about it. A good deal more personal than the love spoken of in Dietzgen or Gandhi. We may have to be closer to Baldwin or to Kollontai at her most revealing and vulnerable moments and to a sense of love's physicality and demanding immediateness. These are themes picked up in a good deal of 20th-century feminist literature where the personal and the political domains are often closely entwined. Among the candidates just considered, Zamyatin's *We* from 1920 goes furthest down this path. It is a novel in which personal love between individuals disrupts political obedience in a more general manner, potentially putting it at odds with revolutionary dictates and certainly with totalitarian power. The direct interest in love that we find in Zamyatin and in the other longstanding Bolshevik authors goes against the more dismissive main current of the Marxist tradition. A main current which appeals more often to the scientific standing of political theory and to conflict poured *outwards* into the definiteness of action rather than moving back and forth between political action and the more ambiguous realm of our inner lives. What results from such an externalization is a warlike belligerence of outlook that threatens to overwhelm a concern for what runs deep within our

understanding of what it is to be human. A Marxist conception of politics in which love as well as morality is driven into exile really does look close to Carl Schmitt's friend/enemy approach. A point which was not lost on Schmitt, who approved of this belligerent aspect of Leninism. It is unlikely that he ever read Kollontai or those few Marxists who tried to deepen our understanding of the political agency of agents who love and for whom love is an important constitutive experience. Again, the sharpness of the contrast of *politics as quasi-war* and *politics as a domain where love may have a place* arises not so much because a discourse of love presents a softer image of political life, but because it opens up more scope for difference. By contrast, and as Clausewitz actually does remind us, war requires a symmetry of forces. Love feeds off of difference rather than sameness or the symmetrical. Talk about love within the domain of politics does not, of course, entail pacifism, not even the heavily qualified pacifism of Gandhi. But it does point toward the abandonment of a problematic metaphor of political conflict as the assembling of two great armies who then fight matters out, with one side winning all the beads.

The realities of what we share, even when we find such realities difficult to see or to acknowledge, help to shape appeals to the language of love even when it is called upon in the midst of controversy and conflict. Again, not as something which originates outside of dissent or derives only from a certain intellectual inclination. When Colin Kaepernick led on-field protests in the National Football League and lost his job as a quarterback, love became a recurring feature of his speeches and justifications for "taking a knee," that is, symbolically kneeling down during the US National Anthem at football games. Kaepernick's protest was one of the factors in the emergence of a broader wave of dissent associated with the Black Lives Matter movement. The movement, decentralized like environmental movements, and built around ideas of organization closer to Zuccotti Park than to the traditional left, predated and influenced Kaepernick's protest. But his protest, and readiness to forego massive sums of money as an elite quarterback, boosted its momentum. In November 2018, at the W. E. B. DuBois medal ceremony in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Kapaernick repeated his point: "Love is at the root of our resistance. And it will continue to be, and it will fortify everything that we do" (Kaepernick 2018). The idea may be hard to place if we approach matters from more familiar left standpoints such as those shaped by social democracy or Marxism other than those of Bogdanov, Kollontai, and Zamyatin. When those within such left traditions appeal to love as something important from a political point of view, it is no longer clear that they are talking *within* their tradition rather than breaching its limits. So much so that Zamyatin's *We*, the work of a long-standing Bolshevik, is often assumed to be the work of an opponent of the Russian revolution. At that time he was not, but later he was. George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984*, which directly draws upon Zamyatin's theme of personal

love as a challenge to the ambitions of totalitarianism after a further quarter century of experience, contrasts with Orwell's more social democratic sensibilities and has always generated unease on the left. Both for the novel's direct critique of Stalinist Russia and for its fusion of personal and darkly eroticized love with political dissent. It is too emotionally and politically complex simply to be assimilated to left critique of Stalinism and sits beyond the regular scope of social democracy in its fears about the state. In both Zamyatin and Orwell, as in James Baldwin's hard talk about love, there is a strong suggestion that the roots of love and of dissent may be closely connected. But this is a picture of things which situates dissent within our humanity more than it does within conceptions of class struggle.

In Orwell's version, the central character studies a critique of political oligarchy as part of his political reeducation. But he does this only after he has become a thought criminal. Only after he has taken a different path. And that path is of a heavily and disturbingly eroticized sort. He has unsanctioned and vaguely masochistic sex rather than organizing strikes against the regime. He is distant from the proles, but physically joined with his lover; this may seem, to a familiar sort of left tradition, to involve the wrong set of priorities. One in which the marginal displaces the necessary. We can see this also in the tendency of social democratic organization simply to incorporate feminism or at least feminists at the expense of turning radical critique into a discourse about equal pay rather than a broader destabilization of ideas about power and gender. Breaches of the traditional left marginalization of love by Zamyatin, Orwell, Kollontai, and Bogdanov eventually end up confronting the realities of our personal lives, the limits of orthodoxy, and the naturalness of talk about love as a way of expressing what matters to us most.

By referring to "naturalness" in this context, I am not, of course, appealing to some literal naturalism, but only to the way in which, when political agents reach for words to capture our more uplifting hopes and experiences or our grief upon loss, an appeal to love is an option that repeatedly presents itself as fitting. It takes a good deal of political theory and notions of *history and traditions* before we lose sight of this naturalness and before the exclusion of love from political discourse starts to seem not just plausible but common sense. At which point, all manner of other concepts start to bleed over and operate as surrogates for talk about love. Concepts such as solidarity, unity, and intersectionality. Concepts which have important roles of their own to play, but which capture a sense of *what we share as humans* only in a diminished sense. If, for example, James Baldwin had said that solidarity or an understanding of intersectionality takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within, he might have said something interesting. But perhaps also less deep. In other words, there are contexts in which nothing substitutes exactly for talk about love, just as there are

contexts in which talk about the human species involves a conceptual loss when it takes the place of talk about our humanity (Gaita 2004: 76).

II The Pittsburg synagogue shooting

Talk about love may well be natural in some political contexts, but acceptance of this point is not the same as some kind of basing of politics upon love or subordination of a political theory to love. It simply puts love in the mix, alongside rights, consequences, agent character, the advocacy of freedoms, and other considerations. It may seem natural at the most uplifting moments, but it can also be something that we reach for when faced with terrible events. At 9:45 a.m. on the morning of 27 October 2018, Robert Gregory Bowers entered the Or L'Simacha synagogue in the Squirrel Hill area of Pittsburg and began to kill people. Armed with an assault rifle and three semiautomatic Glock pistols, he shot the Rosenthal brothers at the main entrance and then headed downstairs to deal with members of the New Light congregation. Jerry Rabinowitz, a doctor belonging to another congregation, went to the aid of the injured and was killed. By the time Bowers had returned upstairs to murder the members of the Tree of Life congregation, several members had already escaped. Eight remained behind, and Bowers killed all but one of them. Afterwards he killed a member of the special weapons and tactics (SWAT) team deployed to deal with him and wounded another. Bowers was wounded but captured alive and received medical care while in police custody. His complaint, as he explained it to one of the SWAT officers, was that Jews were committing genocide against his people. A complaint which registered both antisemitism and the increasingly loose use of the concept of genocide which has become common across different parts of the political spectrum, but most common among political agents who want the concept remodeled around Israel's claim of territorial sovereignty rather than the holocaust, slavery, or the eradication of Indigenous populations during European settlement of the Americas. Bowers's appeal to genocide was not an isolated misdescription, but part of a larger and recurring narrative in which the true perpetrators are the historic victims: Jews as Zionists, Jews as people who do not really belong anywhere, and Jews as migrants and enablers of emigration.

The specific charge in Bowers's case related to Jewish involvement in aid to migrants travelling from the Guatemala/Mexico border to the Mexico/US border. The issue figured prominently in mid-term elections of 2018, when commentators on Fox News took over far-right claims of an "invasion" drawing upon narratives of replacement. A conspiracy theory which emerged out of France earlier in the decade (Ramakrishna 2020). Aid was organized through the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), who followed the precept that good people welcome the stranger in their midst. The support in this case was actually provided to Christian

migrants who were following the Viacrucis del Migrante, the migrant's way of the cross. Claims that the caravans were linked to an international Zionist conspiracy had already figured prominently at a large *Unite the Right* rally in Charlottesville in the autumn of 2017, where Confederate and Nazi flags mingled together in a demonstration focused upon the proposed removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee. A protest more grievance than grief. As sympathizers with organized racism are often uncomfortable with a direct and immediate focus upon Jews as defective white people, or as deformed white people, or as something other than people at all, a familiar substitution chant was used. "*You* will not replace us" transitioned into "Jews will not replace us" (Vice News 2017). Not subtle, but effective. A different path to a familiar goal.

When an injured but very much alive Bowers arrived at Allegheny General Hospital, he was treated by several members of staff who happened to be Jewish. Among them was Ari Mahler, a male nurse with a long personal history of having been harassed, bullied, and threatened because of his background. A history shared by many fellow Americans who happen to be Jewish. In Ari Mahler's case, the personal history of being an object of hate dated back to the swastikas and antisemitic graffiti on his school locker. In the aftermath of the events of the day and having taken some months to process them, Mahler explained his attitude towards Bowers in a Facebook post: "As his nurse, or anyone's nurse, my care is given through kindness, my actions are measured with empathy." Explaining why he had treated Bowers rather than (understandably) excusing himself, Bowers insisted that "regardless of the person you may be when you're not in my care, each breath you take is more beautiful than the last when you're lying on my stretcher" (Kuruvilla 2018). Mahler was aware of who the patient was. Bowers had, in fact, continued to express a desire to kill Jews on the way to the hospital, and had expressed much regret with regard to missed opportunity. More Jews could have been shot. There was no indication of compassion and no apparent numbness at having done something terrible.

"I wanted him to feel compassion," wrote Mahler. "I chose to show him empathy. I felt that the best way to honor his victims was for a Jew to prove him wrong." Mahler's *compassion*, contrasting so strongly with Bowers's anti-Zionist hatred, came from a deep place. It also laid claim to a certain kind of social hope. "My heart yearns for change, but today's climate doesn't foster nurturing, tolerance, or civility." Mahler is quoted in detail here for the remarkable nature of his statements, and also because of the concepts that he reached for in order to bring some cohesion to the many competing impressions of the moment. He reached for the concept of love, a love which set itself against a politicized hate. "Love as an action is more powerful than words, and love in the face of evil gives others hope. It demonstrates humanity. It reaffirms why we're all here" (Kuruvilla 2018). Mahler's Facebook post has been reposted more than

140,000 times. The antisemitic network that Bowers drew from and used is significantly larger. Love seems unlikely to triumph over hate any time soon.

Mahler's appeal to *tolerance, civility*, and *compassion* may also look easier to place within political life than his appeal to a love that demonstrates humanity. Tolerance is a basic requirement of any society in which shared ethical standards are not expected to spread over the whole of life, but are instead expected to leave room for difference, divergence, and private ethical commitments. The division of public and private or individual and social is characteristic of all liberal democratic societies and its erosion is almost definitional of totalitarian states. Hannah Arendt's classic account of such societies, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), turns upon precisely this point. Within totalitarianism, an official ideology of some sort makes its way into all areas of life, leaving nothing untouched, nothing for private citizens to hold onto. A world similar to that of Zamyatin's *We* and Orwell's *1984*. Eventually, there are no truly private citizens, or at least that is the driving aspiration. "Total domination does not allow for free initiative in any field of life, for any activity that is not entirely predictable" (Arendt 1976: 416). Everyone and everything becomes incorporated. In language which owes something to Zamyatin, they are captured within the integral.

Mahler's appeal to *civility* makes sense both as a value and a practice within broadly liberal societies. It goes together with tolerance and plays a special role in dissent. Gandhi too appealed to civility repeatedly, alongside more spiritualized concepts (Milligan 2015). The paradigm form of ethically admirable protest against great wrongs is, after all, civil disobedience, with the concept of civility helping us to distinguish what kinds of protest might qualify from protest of other sorts. Civil Disobedience is marked by a determination to stay within the bounds of various norms of respect for others, the avoidance of reckless endangerment, and the use of largely nonviolent means. Even if there is a time and place for incivility and for uncivil disobedience (Delmas 2018) or even for violence itself. Civility within protest occupies a special place within liberal democracies. Among the other concepts appealed to by Mahler, *compassion* is a little more demanding. Like love, it carries echoes of religious discourse, of St Paul's *agape* and *ahimsa* in traditions such as Buddhism. An inner rejection of hostility to others. Even so, it has received growing attention in broadly liberal literature on conflict resolution and forgiveness. Compassion is functional for liberal democracy, as one of many ways to keep ongoing hostilities within bounds. But there also seem to be moments in political affairs when the ability of compassion to overcome fear, suspicion, and hostility toward the other side is a requirement if a stable liberal democracy or any system with liberal democracy's best features is to be consolidated.

Here, we may think of the protracted peace process in Northern Ireland and the coming together of longstanding opponents on the Catholic side

and the Protestant side. Without people who could honestly acknowledge great suffering across both communities, the process would have failed, with nobody in a position to end the intermittent violence through a comprehensive and final military victory. Without compassion, the troubles would have continued and movement toward a functioning, if precarious, liberal democracy would have remained impossible. With regard to liberal democracy, compassion is not simply functional but sometimes required. Nothing else will do.

By contrast with these more accessible and readily placed concepts, Mahler's appeal to love may seem to take matters too far, toward idealization or the requirement for something resembling moral saintliness. A presupposition here is that these other things are not love or do not involve love as part of their own constitutive makeup. A presupposition more plausible in the case of civility than political compassion. It is not obvious that such compassion is other than love. Especially so, given the diverse forms that love may take, from erotic and romantic love to various kinds of familial love, to love of place, of a god, of companion animals, or of humanity in general. A sufficiently expansive and pluralistic understanding of love may well include compassion in both its regular and politicized forms. Or, it may bring love and compassion closer together as regular accompaniments or as responses joined by multiple causal relations such that loving agents will also be compassionate, and compassionate agents will be more open to love. Martha Nussbaum takes this route in *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (2013) in her rejection of a political realism which relies upon technical and instrumental requirements alone:

> So, nations need those things, but they do not need the heart? They need expertise, but do not need the sort of daily emotion, the sympathy, tears, and laughter, that we require of ourselves as parents, lovers, and friends, or the wonder with which we contemplate beauty.
> (Nussbaum 2013: 397)

Still, we may worry that this can stretch the concepts of love and compassion too far or in an unhelpful direction. The risk is genuine. We do not, after all, want to reduce our conceptual repertoire for political ethics by getting concepts to do much the same kind of thing, so that one or other might then be dispensed with. However, there is a way of understanding love which allows that it nurtures compassion, irrespective of whether or not we think of political compassion itself as a special form of love or as something close but also different.

At the very least, we may still accept the naturalness or "fittingness" of appeals to both. Mahler said the kind of thing that people are inclined to say. But from the fact that we are inclined to say something, little else automatically follows. Soldiers often say that they are fighting to end

wars, but if asked "Why do you want to join the army?" it would be unusual to hear someone say: "I have realized that becoming a soldier will bring peace." Claims of a special and good intent can lend grandeur to more prosaic motivations: the desire to avoid unemployment, a lack of any sense of where else one might belong, and the desire to travel and fire guns. The answer to questions such as "Must we mean what we say?" is not always a resounding "Yes." It is at least conceivable that appeals to love in order to explain actions in political contexts may only be the kind of thing that we say because we feel that we ought to say it or because it looks like something that ought to be true even if it is not. A sense of the dangers of being lured by a fitting comment or by words that we would like to be true may be reinforced when we reflect upon the beautiful things that people say when claiming something that turns out to be false. Truth is not always beauty, nor beauty truth.

III A tension between two thoughts about love

The comments by Mahler and by Kaepernick may be fitting to their circumstances, but they involve appeals to love which remain difficult to situate within politics and simultaneously difficult to ignore. Two familiar thoughts are in tension. One is that we cannot include love within the political without generating a sentimental rather than realistic view of things. The other is that politics is about valuing, and the paradigm form of valuing is love. We cannot then understand politics, unless we understand it in relation to love and ultimately in relation to our experiences of loving and being loved. The first of these thoughts, the exclusion of love from the political, is easier to cash out. We can readily understand why it has seemed so convincing to so many on the left and for so long. In spite of occasional forays into talk about love, the main identity shaping forms of dissent on the left since the late 19th century has been that of allegiance to working-class industrial organization and periodic militancy. It would be odd to frame strikes or collective bargaining or trade union actions of any sort in terms of love. Shop stewards, during the classic era of cohesive militancy from the 1950s to the 1970s, were not chosen because they were more loving agents than others. It would be similarly awkward if the leader of a traditional social democratic party, with an agenda based around subsuming issues of justice within a working-class identity, addressed issues of love in the same way that he might address questions about taxation and economic policy. We would be similarly suspicious about proposals for a new Ministry of Love, sitting alongside similar offices for sport and culture. We would expect any party leader, and not just those associated with social democracy, to frame their agenda in different terms. With rare exceptions, activisms with a left, socialist, and trade union identity have simply not been in the love business.

Part of the reason for this is the apparently personal or private nature of love. But a part may concern a more general downgrading of love, which is present from the very beginnings of modern politics. The classic statement of such downgrading comes from Machiavelli. It is there in *The Prince* (1532), where the medieval Christian ideal of being a much-loved ruler is displaced by strategy, warlike maneuver, and political effectiveness. Machiavelli (2005: 57) notoriously considered "whether it is better to be loved than to be feared." His answer sided with fear. A ruler who is feared at first may be loved later, but a ruler who sets out to be loved from the beginning will have no later to worry about. Here, I am not suggesting that Machiavelli succeeded in excluded love. It is at least covertly present elsewhere in his writings, as a love of the people. His plays and republican *Discourses* radiate a human warmth, combined with a generally low opinion of political leaders. Looking from these texts back to *The Prince*, we may then be inclined to read his patriotism as a love of country and a determination to do what was required to unify it. But when aiming for the most rigorous political realism, love has generally been downgraded, pushed into the waiting room. Accepted as a good, but an occasional one that we must set aside in the interests of power.

This too is a familiar idea. Great power, or wealth, or both may require love's renunciation. Incognito princes may sing songs and fall in love at university, but they must still marry someone else for reasons of state. The theme ranges from the popular to the more demanding. Wagner's *Das Rheingold* (1869) presents the choice on an epic scale: there is gold in the river, and the gold is presumed safe. Its guardian maidens need not worry because only a man who would renounce love would be able to steal it; who would do such a thing? Then comes the man. Someone for whom power is more important. There are deplorable undertones woven into this particular version of the idea of a choice. Undertones about the deformed people who would be ready to choose gold and power over love. Yet, it captures the recurring thought that love and wealth or love and power do not mix well. Also, a recognition that the sacrifices involved in a pursuit of power may be too great. Wagner chooses love over power; yet, there are clearly people he does not love. Jews are the standing example. We may reflect upon this idea of a choice when thinking about what we personally become in the furtherance of political goals, and it may be less of a description of a fixed state of affairs than a warning of some importance. Imagining that we can have it all, political influence which is in some way informed by love may then seem dangerously naïve. An evasion of a difficult dilemma concerning things which do not sit well together.

This recognition of a tension between political power and love is a little harder to get away from than the simple dismissal of talk about love as sentimental. We think of love in terms of harmony, or at least as an uneasy truce, while politics tends toward open conflict. Something closer to a world of friends and enemies, but perhaps with more enemies than

friends. Viewing others in this way hardly qualifies as a loving attitude. In spite of fine words and Kapaernik's framing of dissent, we do not ordinarily love our enemies or even our political opponents. And we may not be entirely convinced that Mahler loved his. Perhaps Gandhi did. Perhaps Martin Luther King did also, even if he doubted his own claims. Yet, even if they managed to love in this demanding way, we are not Gandhi, or King, or Christ, or even Kaepernick, and the ways in which we can genuinely care for those who oppose us is more restricted. It may be shaped by the situation and experience of what is possible, as much as it is by our best wishes or desires to be better persons.

There is, however, a possible way around the problem, a way to say that love really is in play without requiring us to love those we encounter in ways which tend to render them unlovable. If the love that is supposedly due even to enemies is in some respects a love of something else, something other than the enemy or those who oppose us with some less intense hostility, then it may remain possible. Even advisable. Mahler's comments suggest something of this sort, an attitude toward humanity and toward the humanity of the other. And so does Gandhi's concept of *sarvodya* and his way of appealing to *ahimsa*. If the love in question is love of humanity, expressed through an attitude toward enemies which might take any number of forms (e.g., compassion), then it will still be genuine love, yet not beyond our reach. Not beyond the reach of the ordinary protesting agent. There may be extreme contexts in which it becomes psychologically difficult and unwise to sustain any such sense of a shared humanity in our relations with those who oppress and hate. But otherwise, a shared humanity with others, as members of a single ongoing moral community, may be due recognition.

In attempts to think about love as such an attitude toward humanity, an incident recounted in Orwell's retrospective 1943 essay "Looking Back on the Spanish War" is sometimes appealed to. Orwell tells us of a soldier on the other side, the wrong side. Someone fighting for Franco and fascism during the Spanish Civil War. Caught by gunfire while defecating. The soldier runs with his trousers only partially held up. Out in the open and available to be shot. Yet, he is not shot:

> I did not shoot partly because of that detail about the trousers. I had come here to shoot at "Fascists"; but a man who is holding up his trousers isn't a "Fascist", he is visibly a fellow-creature, similar to yourself, and you don't feel like shooting at him.
>
> (Orwell 2003: 164)

The point here is not about the rights and wrongs of when one is allowed to shoot the enemy. The rights and wrongs of shooting a terrorist who has his finger on the trigger of a bomb would not depend upon his state of dress. Orwell's point concerns moments when a sense of something

deeper breaks through, the sense of *someone like ourselves*. Someone who could be ourselves or who could be cared for in the way that we are cared for and, in turn, care for others. And what matters here is not how much DNA we each have in common or whether there is a surprisingly recent point in time at which the idea of shared humanity came into existence. Rather, it is more to do with a recognition of the hopes, joys, failures, and vulnerabilities that we have and may fall victim to.

The attitude in the Orwell example concerns an individual. But it also concerns something else. It is not about only one thing. Similarly, we have all seen black and white films, variations upon a theme by Charlotte Brontë, in which a young woman marries an unhappy widower only to find that he has a large painting of his first wife on the wall of some grand country house. Draped in black. The dead woman looks suspiciously similar to the new wife. Who does he love? There is no need here to say that he loves only the one and not the other or some imagined composite of both. Love's complexity allows it to encompass many things. And this does not make love different from other emotions or from other emotion-like states. The intentionality of emotions is typically mixed. They are usually *about* more than one thing. A misfiring day at work may lead any of us to react badly when something then goes wrong at home: the internet connection is lost, the television misbehaves. Are we angry at the latter or at everything that has gone before it? The plausible answer seems to be *both*. Anger, love, and compassion are often about more than one thing, yet they are not always formed in the same image. (Unlike the Brontë case.)

Perhaps only the kind of love which is personally and exclusively about enemies, and which is only a response to them as particular beings, may then seem unlikely, or may seem to ask too much, or for the wrong sort of thing. Otherwise, politicized talk about love can occupy a different place in dissent and within discourses about the latter. Even if it is sometimes expressed as if it must refer to an unlikely love or to a reprehensible one. Love for Stalin was always a bad idea. And we would not want to love Orwell's pant-fallen fascist in their own right, for what they uniquely are, even if love is accepted as part of a defensible response to their fear, panic, and distress. An attitude toward a shared humanity, which is valued for its own sake but recognized in the other person on the other side, is quite a different matter. Or at least, it will be so if we are not overly fond of the idea that humanity itself is an oppressive piece of imagery, something liable to be washed away by a tide of better things. Michel Foucault deployed this image a number of years ago, the idea that the human may be erased, "like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" (Foucault 2003: 422). In a sense, I am not denying this possibility. But I am denying the possibility that nothing will take its place, and affirming that whatever might take its place will have to perform many of the same

roles. The erasure of ideas of humanity happens all the time, but what resurfaces is another idea to take its place. Another face in the sand. And mostly, it looks like a different idea of the human. If we think of an idea of humanity in these terms, in terms closer to those found in dissident literature written under dehumanizing political systems, then we might think that a love for humanity is not some bad or sentimental thing. And the fact that what is loved shifts and changes over time is no more a barrier to such love than the fact that I change over time and have become very different from the person who met my wife at the end of our teens. Yet, she loves me, and I love her, and we each love the other as they are now and as we both change together over time. A shifting conception of humanity can equally be a conception of a moral community which may be valued continuously and in often unnoticed ways. And valued also through the sense that the end of this moral community or its lapse into something less inclusive would be a terrible thing. Something to be feared or mourned.

This is territory of some depth, where it is difficult to make headway and easy to lapse into beautiful ideas with little obvious relation to political realities. Nonetheless, there are some forms of dissent, such as the kinds of anti-racism which have emerged out of the Black community rather than out of sympathetic white activism modeled on trade unionism, which have historically tended to be more open to ideas of a shared humanity and to the possibility of love for humanity as a moral community. Perhaps this is because so much has been invested by such dissent in the idea of *being just as human* as anyone else. Really human, with real feelings and vulnerabilities to a real sense of loss. Employers have not, historically, doubted the humanity of strikers in the way that all manner of white people have doubted the full humanity of those subjected to racism. It is noteworthy that the language of the Civil Rights Movement, which echoes on in Kaepernick's appeal to love as the root of resistance, sets out a different pathway from anything resembling traditional social democracy, even if it has parallels in the thought of the occasional social democrat (like Orwell) or the occasional Marxist (such as Kollontai and Zamyatin). Something of this legacy of the Civil Rights Movement, a response to a shared humanity in the face of an ongoing prejudice, can also be seen in Mahler's response, as someone from a Jewish community whose full humanity has yet to be fully embraced and whose effective entitlement to *any* portion of the Earth remains contested. Some traditions of dissent make a common humanity easier to acknowledge. Others direct our attention elsewhere.

IV Established pathways in the politics of love

Two established ways of bringing love into discussions of politics are present above, but in a somewhat entangled form. Here, I will try to

disentangle them and to use one of them in order to extend and clarify the idea that love as a recognition of a shared humanity has a legitimate role in our political lives. For simplicity and to give them clear precedent, we can refer to a "Platonic option" and an "Aristotelian option." Both carry insight. Of the two, I am more sympathetic toward a modified version of the Aristotelian option and more concerned about the risks of its Platonic rival. However, the rivalry is constrained. Commitment to one need not rule out commitment to the other. On the Platonic option, love is *eros*, desire, or longing which tends toward perfectionist ends and which may be directed in support of political objectives. This idea draws upon a metaphor of channeling which traces back to the *Republic*. "Whenever a man's desires flow in full current towards any one object, like a stream that has had a channel dug for it, towards all other objects they flow the more feebly" (*Rep* 485d). The metaphor recurs in Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) and in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930) as "libido," which may be directed this way or that but which is subject to a principle of economy. Desire channeled or "cathected" *this* way is no longer available to be channeled in *that* way.

On Freudian accounts, the patterning of how desire is channeled is liable to be a historic legacy of infancy or else a form of narcissism in which one is preoccupied with self. Martin Luther King deploys a clearly Freudian-inflected version of love in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (1963) when he says:

> The Negro has many pent-up resentments and latent frustrations. He has to get them out. So let him march sometime; let him have his prayer pilgrimages to the city hall; understand why he must have sit-ins and freedom rides. If his repressed emotions do not come out in these nonviolent ways, they will come out in ominous expressions of violence. This is not a threat; it is a fact of history. So, I have not said to my people, "Get rid of your discontent." But I have tried to say that this normal and healthy discontent can be channeled through the creative outlet of nonviolent direct action.
>
> (King 1963)

Gandhi's borrowing of the metaphor is, like much else in his metaphysics, less clear-cut. On the more direct Platonic accounts, such channeling affords opportunities: love directed toward the good draws off possibilities for misdirected love. The best way to resist evil is to love the good or at least some ideal which will leave evil with little to work with. The idea can readily be adapted for political goals, with the best-known move of this sort made by Simone Weil in *The Need for Roots*, written as a vision of how French society might be built back in a better way after wartime destruction and occupation. Weil traces the dangerous love of the political leader, evident in both Nazism and Communism, to a felt need to

love something human in the face of a dominating state. The need will find a way. "The State is a cold concern which cannot inspire love, but itself kills, suppresses everything that might be loved; so one is forced to love it, because there is nothing else" (Weil 2002: 111). She insists upon the need for a great political ideal to be posited, a great ideal other than the state yet beyond bourgeois comfort, which would help to motivate citizen action toward the good. The mundane realities of bourgeois life would otherwise be no match for demagogues like Hitler driven by the wrong kind of mysticism.

We may detect something of the same political need to love a great and good idea in Solzhenitsyn, a longing to sacrifice comfort for ideals or a longing to be the kind of person who is capable of such things. In the opening pages of *The Gulag Archipelago* he wrote that the Soviet system of oppression was possible because those who fell victim to it, such as himself, did not love freedom enough. We may feel that he was being overly harsh on those who suffered, including himself. Such love is not expected; it appears to be something out of the ordinary. And so, when political figures speak about a love of freedom in liberal democracies, we may suspect that it is exaggeration and show or else something genuine but dangerous. As it was in the case of demonstrations for "freedom" from public health restrictions during the COVID-19 lockdowns of 2020–2021. Motivations for these demonstrations were no doubt mixed, but there is no obvious reason to deny that a segment of protestors were not simply using the occasion to vent anger, but genuinely believed that freedoms were being placed under threat by overreaching states. Actual love of freedom in anything resembling Solzhenitsyn's robust sense may seem to border upon a fanaticism, which is unwelcome within liberal democratic societies where commitments are not expected to be so strong or literal. Overall, the idea that we need to love a great and good political ideal looks like it may work better under authoritarian systems, where a more dramatically expressed love of democracy may be no bad thing. Paradoxically, the love of freedom and democracy carries over poorly into the routine life of actual democracies.

However it is set out, the account of a channeled politicized love faces a number of problems. One is the conceptual difficulty of understanding the relationship between love and desire. We may desire the emergence of a better society, but is this love? And if it is love, is it love of a good sort or some manner of disguised narcissism? Might it not be more accurate to think of it as love of a future, imagined and better, version of ourselves? Freud suggested as much in his seminal essay "On Narcissism" (1914), and the connections to Platonic *eros* have been noticed (Santas 1988). If love is reduced to desire on its own, even to a channeled desire, this worry may grow. By contrast, we may think of love as something more mixed and complex, as a way of being and responding that involves a belief like component as well as desires of various different sorts. In combination

with a broadening of our understanding of love, we may also reflect that all love carries risk, and the risk of a covert narcissism may only be one risk among many. A critique of politicized love which relies too heavily upon worries about this risk may collapse from a point about politics into a form of skepticism about love itself. And those who are sympathetic to the former may not be so enthusiastic about the latter. The fear that love, including politicized love, is simply narcissism also seems very far from the phenomenology of certain kinds of love. Far from the lived experience of loving and being loved, in which we may have a striking sense of being genuinely concerned about something other than ourselves. Love at least feels like it is directed toward what is other, even if the relentless ego may be tricking us.

So, let us allow that in some sense, the phenomenology of love or of certain kinds of love may not be entirely misleading. Let us allow that it may be more than narcissism. And let us allow some further difficulties to unfold, such as a concern about the channeling of a mass of eroticized desire in any given singular direction. If we go this far, the idea of love channeled in one way, toward a great political goal, is at risk of overriding individual difference and the marked tendency for love to be multiply directed in different ways by different agents. To say that we all love is not at all the same as saying that we might all love the same thing, even in some disguised form. And it is not the same as saying that we can be reshaped to love the same thing through the right kind of political leadership. There are overtones here of something beyond communitarian commitment, something vaguely elitist and unsettling. A way back to the elitist vision of political leadership which motivated so much of the tradition of social democracy, especially of the social democratic left. If only the right leadership was in place, then all would go well. The idea of channeling love or of anger transformed into love presupposes political leaders, who in some sense sit on the whirlwind and direct the storm. Perhaps there are some contexts in which this may be required. Yet, it is a way of thinking about matters which jars with our more egalitarian sympathies. Politicized love, which turns out to require such elitist leadership, is suspect. Which is not to say that something of this sort cannot happen or that it does not happen. Perhaps it occurs all too often. But this does not make it something to be admired or a means worth promoting rather than avoiding.

Perhaps an appeal to love of this desirous and channeled sort may still be rescued by shifting the focus of love away from some special set of great political goals and toward humanity as a whole. This at least allows us to deal with the most obvious problems beyond those of a concern about elitism and emotional manipulation. It preserves the sense of love as motivation which is at the heart of the metaphor of love as a driving energy. And it allows for an account of love in which we do not literally love strangers, or the policeman encountered suddenly for the first time

on a demonstration, or the person approaching us with no good intent at a civil disturbance. In some sense, we might direct love toward them, but the love is ultimately for humanity and not for the individual. Love for humanity may nonetheless seem to face at least some of the same problems as love for enemies and opponents, thought of as particular others. For one thing, it is still love for something uniform. Even if it is a love that many of us admittedly do share, many of us would deny having any such love. Some might even revolt at the idea that humanity is worth loving, either on the nominalist grounds that *humanity* lacks the particularity of individuals or because they believe that a special attitude toward humans must be an archaism, because we are post-humans, or a sort of speciesism and therefore misplaced. Here, we may tackle matters at the level of a multiplicity of reasons why humanity might not be loveable or we can make a single fell swoop move by appealing to an argument in which love is a precondition of other things that we more readily accept.

I will suggest that we take the pathway offered by this fell swoop move as the best available option. On this line of thought and unlike love for some political ideal, love for humanity may be thought of in the manner suggested by Samuel Scheffler (2013) as something that sits in the background. It is part of the canvas rather than the painting, an unrecognized precondition of many of our familiar way of thinking about things rather than an explicit belief that we might be persuaded into by political leaders or something that we might suddenly adopt in the name of a cause. On this line of thought, an implicit or tacit love of humanity renders other attitudes intelligible. Our care for future generations is perhaps the most forceful example. Why would we worry about future generations if we did not in some sense love humanity? Is it simply because we have a minimizing attitude toward pain or believe in the *rights* of beings who have not yet come into existence? The content of such ideas is difficult to place without acknowledgment that the end of humanity is something to be avoided. We do not want it to happen, even if it occurs in ways less traumatizing than a destruction of human life. Humanity's sudden end without any successor is something that many of us think of as a calamitous prospect, irrespective of what other creatures might survive and even flourish. It is something that we would grieve over, if we were to anticipate it within the bounds of anything but the most distant thought. But the bounds of love and of grief are one and the same. The things we love are the things we grieve over or whose loss renders such grief intelligible. Love which is directed or even cathected in this way may have political dimensions and may drive much dissent geared to the future of humanity. But unlike the attempt to channel love toward great political ideals, it is not channeled or directed by anyone in particular, and so it comes with fewer concerns about elitism. Unless of course we happen to buy into some critique of concern for humanity as itself oppressive or in some unavoidable way complicit with the operations of power. With this humanity-directed revision to our

understanding of love's intentionality, my caution about the Platonic option does not go all the way down. Some version of it may work.

On the more Aristotelian rather than Platonic option, love gets politicized through an account of *philia politike* rather than *eros*. Political friendship rather than erotic economy. The thought is that a world of mutually respectful but distant citizens acknowledging one another's equality and liberty will not yield enough social solidarity to sustain a sense of shared community. Mutual respect might be enough to hold together good relations among a group of strangers on a train, but it is not enough to hold together a broader conception of a common good. For the latter, there must always be things that we must be ready to do and fight for, not just for our own sake, but for the sake of others: children, friends, family, those we love. This is what real communities are like, when they are not just assemblages of individuals passing through on their way to somewhere else. While understood primarily in terms of *philia* (love exemplified by the bond between close friends), the attitudes and feelings in question are also liable to spill over into *eros*. At which point, an imagery of desire and longing is more appropriate. Few contemporary commentators will uphold a rigid separation of the two. My thought in distinguishing between them is not an attempt to reproduce an unbridgeable gap between two kinds of love, but simply to question the extent to which an account of politicized love, which appeals to a sense of fraternity, *must* call upon Platonized erotic metaphors and the idea of an intensity of feeling directed toward some singular goal.

As with the Platonic option, we may again question whether or not *philia* and the fraternal feeling of a moral community is love rather than something else. Hannah Arendt was tempted by this move, and accepted the need for something like *philia politike* while questioning whether it was really love. "I have never in my life 'loved' any people or collective – neither the German people, nor the French, nor the Americans, nor the working class or anything of that sort. I indeed love 'only' my friends and the only kind of love I know of and believe in is the love of persons" (Arendt 2007: 466–467). Here, we see Arendt help to set up two of the longstanding concerns about a politics of love: that we might love something which is not only less inclusive than humanity, but something actually disreputable and that we might love in a narcissistic manner. Love of friends is something else, at least so long as we do not see our friends as *another self*, or as a mirror of the self, or of one's political attitudes. If I love you because you share my beliefs, then we may both wonder whether I really love you at all. Yet, this looks suspiciously like the way that Bogdanov and Kollontai picture love, and Plato is not altogether hostile to the same picture of intoxication through shared belief and shared commitment. Arendt wants nothing to do with this picture. Love of friends, on her account, is apolitical, in the sense that it allows feeling to cut across differences which include political divides. Yet, this curiously looks like

another and different way of politicizing love, by allowing it to defy norms that lead us to divide ordinary humans into those we should love and those we should not love on the basis of some or other political disagreement.

Even so, this is not quite Aristotle's way of politicizing love, a way in which loving friendship and multiple overlapping relationships between loving friends are preconditions for a cohesive political community. And here, it seems that Aristotle may simply have been right. There are no political communities in which friendships are marginal or have the standing only of a special group interest. The relationships by which a society is woven together may be thought of as having a political dimension, as being partly constitutive of a shared political world. And they are inclusive of love between friends, interlocked in the constitution of a political community. Love of this sort looks like an invitation to a kind of belonging which is altogether worldly, and the lack of love looks like something that may sever our sense of embeddedness in the world.

We may worry about where this leads us. Where, in particular, an Aristotelian approach situates those who do not or cannot form friendships. People outside of the games of love and companionship. On Aristotle's account, it looks like they will make poor citizens. They look a little like freeloaders, carried along by others among whom the necessary bonds exist. Such an idea places us back in the territory of elitism, back in the territory of the same worries we encountered with the channeling of *eros*. The worry, at its simplest, concerns the danger of building politics around the sycophant and the "joiner in." The person who says "yes" to all games and is never last to be picked. Love valued because it is politically integrative is a source of. It echoes a readiness to sacrifice, even to die for one's comrades, and this is no great distance from a comradeship which may be embodied by a leader whose very being expresses the collectivity as well as shaping it. A dangerous comradeship, like that depicted in the memoirs of frontline, steel helmet soldiers, whose experience of shared danger inspired the worst political movement of the 20th century. Disunity is surely better than the unity of songs and bierkellers or celebrations of comrades shot and gone. Solzhenitsyn's unfinished *Love the Revolution* (mostly written in 1948) is a little along these lines too, albeit what is experienced is the absence of comradeship. Isolation from the group. The central character is not only ready to sacrifice himself for the struggle, but actually longs to do so, and is seriously disappointed when the opportunity does not arise due to a classification of being medically unfit. Eventually called up for a horse-drawn transport unity, he finds himself surrounded on all sides by middle-aged men who lack ideological fervor. Periodically depressed when waves of truth wash over him, he manages to hold onto his revolutionary faith. While it is tempting to say "No, this is not *philia*" or "This is not at all what Aristotle meant," it may be closer to both than we are comfortable with. Aristotle's world was a place where these things might be appreciated. Thought of separately from the background idea of

a love for humanity, of the same sort that *eros* may require, *philial* love can be just as dangerous as the kinds of politically demanded love that Arendt disliked. On its own, the *philia politike* of those who join in and feel at home within a community may not do enough to sustain a sense that ordinary but troubled agents should not be left behind.

With a background love of humanity in place, Aristotle's deeper idea may more safely be drawn out. Not as a claim about how good it is to be a "joiner in," but rather as the idea that *in regarding agents as legitimate candidates for membership of the same political community, we regard them as beings who could be loved by some member of the community. Not necessarily by ourselves, but by someone within the community.* Those agents whom we regard not just as opponents, but as being *beyond* a defensible love, *beyond* the sharing and promoting of interests in common, are beings we also cannot regard as fellow citizens. The possibility of a commonality of interests and the possibility that someone may be loved as we are loved, and love others in return, are integral to any plausible conception of actual citizenship. The kind of conception that people might actually live with rather than the thinned out idea of citizenship as a sort of bare equality before the law. The converse is that shared citizenship makes no sense with those who have betrayed their humanity. Those who have left themselves no way back. I cannot share a common good with an Eichmann or a Jefferson Davis. I can only hope that humanity is protected from such people. But a similar betrayal of humanity cannot honestly be attributed to those who are merely political opponents.

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Conclusion

It is difficult in the midst of changes to seek out what matters most and to set aside background noise. Another way of putting the point would be to say that ideas, like empires and political parties, rise and fall. They have their day and are then gone. Transitory fascinations go out of date as do other concerns which have their own limited timespan. In the face of change, what I have tried to do here has been to focus almost exclusively upon matters of depth, that is, considerations that do not so easily go away even when we might want them to do so. Love, grief, loss, and the longing for some better future are part of the mix. These matters of depth have also been approached from an ethical point of view. Although it is interesting to track opinion polls, membership data, and the emergence of internal activist concepts (such as "slacktivism" and "virtue signaling"), these have not been my primary concern. Instead, I have tried to focus upon concerns whose recurring significance and greater duration is an indication of their depth, and upon commentators who share a concern with such matters rather than the most recent collections of figures with some grand plan for fixing the world, or fixing the left, or fixing the one and then the other. And so, Rorty and Havel figure in the text, but Žižek does not. Orwell is there, but Ralph Nader is not. All these people are interesting and certainly not shallow, but "interesting and not shallow" is not exactly the same as deep.

I have also restricted the focus of the text to the internal life of liberal democracies, drawing primarily upon the experience of the US and the UK rather than liberal democracies across Europe or in places such as Japan and Israel. The aim has not been to provide a survey, although the trends and problems which have shaped the analysis have been informed by a broader view of what is happening within liberal democracies more generally. One of the largest shifts at this scale is the uneven institutional decline of social democracy, a decline which can only partially be seen in the UK and which would be hard to detect if the US was thought of in isolation from everywhere else. In spite of its organizational decline, social democracy casts a long shadow and is likely to do so for years after its main organizational expressions have been reduced to the level

DOI: 10.4324/9780429022524-9

of one minority voice among many. In some ways, this is a text written within this shadow of social democracy. It has had a profound influence upon how we think of all dissent within liberal democracies. Its image of a binary world, of two great sides, left and right, progressive and reactionary, remains a persistent influence.

Almost everything in the text has however been an attempt to get beyond this way of thinking, and instead to consider dissent in line with a conception of a shared humanity of the sort appealed to in dissident literature. Again, this is not an attempt to deny the significance of talk about the post-human or an attempt to set up some essentialist account of what it is that makes any of us human. Rather, it is consistent with the view that the idea of the human may itself have a shelf life, even if it has turned out to be a long one. What drives my concern with the human is the idea of a shared humanity and our capacity to see ourselves as part of a shared moral community that persists through time and stretches off into a future filled with other generations to whom we owe many things. I have tried to make sense of the importance of dissent (of a politically restricted sort) for this community, not simply as an instrumental means to specific ends, but as a way of expressing social hope, prejudice, and belonging. Crossovers involving all of these things together are increasingly common, although what is changing may be our recognition of this fact rather than the fact itself. Left-right crossovers are a special example, with the migration back and forth of antiestablishment and anti-elite ideas from far right and far left. Historically, the far right has been fond of appropriating left critiques of banking capital and has fused them with antisemitism; sections of the far left have then attempted to reappropriate the modified critiques with some equally modified terminology. Conspicuously, "Zionists" end up targeted rather than "Jews," but the actual humans targeted does not change.

Such ongoing traffic between left and right helps to make the idea of moral superiority sitting *here* rather than *there* hard to sustain. For practical purposes, I have suggested that it makes a good deal of sense to think of ourselves as down on all fours with each other, in spite of our political differences, at least for most agents. My argument has been that *our* political commitments do not make us into better people while *their* commitments make opponents into worse people. The world could have been structured in that way, but it does not appear to be so structured. Virtue and vice seem to be more random and distributed in less predictable ways. Yet, the absence of any standing moral superiority among one section of the political community says nothing at all about what is right and wrong in the way of political causes. Some political causes stand up for truth and justice, others do not. And the recognition of a shared humanity rather than a world divided neatly into friends and enemies may itself operate as an encouragement to certain kinds of dissent rather

than operating as a way of papering over the multiple forms of injustice that continue to exist under conditions of liberal democracy. We might even suspect that, as I do, injustice is endemic to liberal democracy, given that it is also endemic to the kinds of economic system that it is entangled with. Liberal democracy is not exactly a political superstructure set upon a capitalist base. Societies are not buildings, but our best ways of doing things have nonetheless depended upon the operations of economic processes which are far from innocent or fair. This is the story *so far*.

The restriction of focus to liberal democracies has also not been out of a sense of the absolute merits or finality of this kind of political system or the finality of capitalism. Economic systems do not last and neither do political systems. Other systems will come after, and some may be better. But liberal democracy, for all its many faults, has been best able to answer to human needs and best able to realize human goods. It has done so imperfectly, and has left a good deal to protest about and a great many occasions on which the truth has needed to be spoken to power. Arguably, there is a continuous need for this to happen. Dissent within the context of liberal democracy has also been resistant to drawing upon anything other than its own conceptual repertoire of rights, justice, duties, tolerance, and entitlements. Concepts from the outside, such as *satyagraha* and *ahimsa*, continue to be held at a distance within our core public political discussions, in spite of a growing acceptance that there is a risk of enclosure inside a colonialist mindset; the risk that we might accept much of the framework set out by the colonial ethicists of the opening chapter. Given the consolidated presence of such concepts within activist circles, we may wonder how long this partitioning of *liberal democratic* and *other* concepts can remain the case. I have tried to allow room for this to change, while outlining some of the difficulties involved in using a conceptual shift to reimagine dissent. Thinking in terms of protest shaped by concepts such as *ahimsa* rather than solidarity or the civility of civil disobedience has a downside as well as some advantages.

I have also tried to draw attention to the inadequacies of the conceptual repertoire customarily associated with dissent within liberal democracies, particularly its difficulty making sense of the ideas of *political grief* and of *love* as political phenomena. These two ideas are related. We can only grieve over what we love, and love, in turn, sets the bounds of grief. It sets bounds to the sense of loss that is often the price of political change and which can hardly be avoided if historic injustices are to be tackled. But the love in question can make little sense if we think of it in terms of loving our enemies or loving individual political opponents. It makes more sense if we think of it as a response to a shared humanity. That is, as a way of caring for the present and the future of our larger

moral community. The last word here goes to love, with all of its dangers and flaws. It is both dangerous in the domain of politics (as Hannah Arendt suspected) and ineradicable. Something deep that returns as a driver of longing and actions even if we prefer to speak in terms of rights, justice, and equality. Within political life, as elsewhere, we remain the beings that we are, and our greatest and hidden driver is love.

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