

INTRODUCTION WHY COMPROMISE?

The Concern

ALBERT EINSTEIN is credited with the warning "Beware of rotten compromises."¹ My book is an effort to explain and support this warning.

But the book is about much more. It is about peace and compromise.

More specially: what compromises we are not allowed to make for the sake of peace.

The short answer is: rotten compromises are not allowed, even for the sake of peace. Other compromises should be dealt with on a retail basis, one by one: they should be judged on their merit. Only rotten compromises should be ruled out on a wholesale basis. Even though the book is about compromises that we should avoid, come what may, its main goal is to leave the widest (morally) possible room for compromises made for the sake of peace, including cases in which peace is achieved at the expense of justice. The book is in pursuit of just *a* peace, rather than of a *just* peace. Peace can be justified without being just.

This is not an easy claim to make, but this is the claim I am making.

The compromises discussed in the book are political compromises, rather than personal ones. The distinction is not always clear. Some personal deals have immense political

implications. Robert Oppenheimer's role in creating the atomic bomb is often referred to as a Faustian bargain. According to Freeman Dyson, the deal was this: an atomic bomb in exchange for the chance to do physics on a grand scale,² or, more to the point, Oppenheimer's being in charge of doing physics on a grand scale. Whatever the real details of Oppenheimer's Faustian pact are, the political implication of the atomic bomb is as obvious as its mushroom cloud.

I see a rotten political compromise as an agreement to establish or maintain an inhuman regime, a regime of cruelty and humiliation, that is, a regime that does not treat humans as humans. Throughout the book I use "inhuman" to denote extreme manifestations of not treating humans as humans. Inhuman in the sense of cruel, savage, and barbarous behavior conveys only one element of "inhuman" as I use the word; humiliation is another element. Humiliation, as I see it, is already not treating humans as humans, but humiliation intensified by cruelty equals "inhuman." So a fusion of cruelty and humiliation is what an inhuman regime consists of.

The idea of an inhuman regime, a regime of cruelty and humiliation, guides my understanding of rotten compromises. The basic claim is that we should beware of agreeing, even passively, to establish or maintain a regime of cruelty and humiliation—in short, an inhuman regime.

Many bad things popped out of Pandora's box, and choosing inhuman regimes as the bad thing to avoid at all costs calls for justification.

Inhuman regimes erode the foundation of morality. Morality rests on treating humans as humans; not treating humans as humans undermines the basic assumption of morality. I draw a distinction between *morality* and *ethics*. Morality is about how human relations should be in virtue of our being human and in virtue of nothing else.

Ethics, in contrast, is about what relations we *should* have with other people in virtue of some special relationships we *have* with them, such as family relations or friendship.

Morality, by its very nature, is based on the category of belonging to humanity, in the sense of belonging to the human species. The assault on humanity inflicted when humans are treated as nonhumans undermines the very project of morality, the project of constituting human relations as they should be.

For the sake of defending morality we end up with a stern injunction: rotten compromise must be avoided, come what may. But what does the "come what may" come to? Chapters 4 and 5 are meant to answer this question. The upshot is that the "come what may" should be taken quite literally.

Let me stress again, the book contains stern warnings against rotten compromises, yet its aim is to provide strong advocacy for compromises in general, and compromises for the sake of peace in particular. It limits wholesale prohibitions on compromises to the bare minimum. Limiting wholesale prohibitions to the bare minimum does not mean that all compromises are justified. There might be good reasons to reject a particular compromise on the ground that it is unfair, unreasonable, or untimely. Selling Manhattan (in 1624) for merchandise worth 60 guilders was not a terribly good idea for the Native Americans involved, nor, for that matter, was the selling of Alaska by the Russians (in 1867) for 7.2 million dollars.

I do not subscribe to the adage "A lean compromise is better than a fat lawsuit."³ But I do claim that only rotten compromises should be prohibited in all circumstances. Other compromises should be evaluated on their merit, case by case. Some may turn out to be shady deals (deals with suspicious motives), shoddy deals (exchange of phony goods,

"beads and buttons," for true valuables), or shabby deals (exploitative ones, taking advantage of the vulnerability of the weak party). These are all forms of morally bad deals, yet given the alternatives, they might on occasion be justified. Rotten compromises are different. They are never *justified*; at best, they may be *excused*.

Rotten compromises usually are at the heart of darkness. Extreme forms of racist regimes are the epitome of not treating humans as humans, and constitute a direct affront to the assumption of shared humanity. A compromise to establish or maintain racist regimes is the epitome of rottenness.

Indeed, one depressing example of a rotten agreement has the characteristics of Joseph Conrad's celebrated *Heart of Darkness*.⁴ Though this example is a clear case of a rotten compromise, it blurs the line between a personal rotten deal and a collective rotten deal. It concerns the private domain of King Leopold II of Belgium over the Congo, under the sham of "enlightening Africa." If there have ever been regimes of cruelty and humiliation, this king's personal rule of that colony, between 1880 and 1908, is surely among them. The population of the Congo was not only enslaved and inhumanely brutalized, but also half of it (between eight and ten million) was slaughtered in order to "lighten the darkness of Africa."⁵ Thus Conrad's book, as we learn from Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost*, is not an allegory but a reality. Leopold's Congo Free State constituted a direct assault on the very notion of shared humanity.⁶

Two types of agreements were involved in the workings of the Congo Free State. One dealt with the acquisition of land in the Congo, usually from local chieftains. Agreements of this type can hardly be described as compromises. They were extracted by threats and direct intimidation. The other type of agreements, such as those concluded among

Leopold II, France, and the United States (1884–1885), are compromises—and very rotten ones at that. They contain trade advantages in the Congo in exchange for the recognition of Leopold's inhuman regime. These rotten compromises differ from shady, shoddy, and shabby compromises; they are morally wrong at all times. Leopold II ran the Congo as his private realm. One may therefore say that agreements with Leopold, bad as they were, were personal agreements, not political compromises between two collectives. This is technically true, but only technically.

Compromise, an Ambivalent Concept

The concept of compromise, I believe, should take center stage in micromorality (dealing with individuals' interactions) as well as in macromorality (dealing with political units). After all, we very rarely attain what is first on our list of priorities, either as individuals or as collectives. We are forced by circumstances to settle for much less than what we aspire to. We compromise. We should, I believe, be judged by our compromises more than by our ideals and norms. Ideals may tell us something important about what we would like to be. But compromises tell us who we are.⁷

The compromises we eventually settle on, if we are lucky, are our second-best choices, and often not even that. But, again, they tell us more about our moral standing than does an account of our first priority.⁸

Yet the concept of compromise is neither at center stage in philosophical discussion nor even on its back burner. One reason why compromise does not occur as a philosophical topic stems from the philosophical bias in favor of ideal theory. Compromise looks messy, the dreary stuff of day-to-day

politics. It looks very different from the ideal theory of micro- or macromorality. Indeed ideal theory concerns norms and ideals, not second bests. But removing compromise from moral theory is like removing friction from physics, claiming that it belongs to engineering.

Compromise is an ambivalent concept. It carries opposing evaluative forces. It is a "boo-hurrah" concept—a positive notion signaling human cooperation, coupled with a negative notion signaling betrayal of high-minded principles. Compromise is regarded on some occasions as an expression of goodwill, and on other occasions as being wishy-washy.

An *ambivalent* concept is different from an *essentially contested* concept.⁹ The latter has an uncontested and uncontested good connotation, and the contest deals only with what represents the best example of its kind. During the Cold War "democracy" was an essentially contested term between communists and liberals. For communists, the People's Democracy of Eastern Europe was a "real" democracy, and liberal democracy was a mere "formal" democracy; whereas for liberals it was the liberal democracy of Western Europe that was real, and the People's Democracy a euphemism for oppressive party dictatorship. The point here, however, is that both sides regarded "democracy" as a good word, each trying to appropriate its positive connotation for its own ideology. Ambivalent words are different; they are both good and bad.

But then we should remember that politics is not an exercise in linguistic philosophy, and that a contest about the use of words is never about words alone. What is contested in the case of "compromise" is the very idea of compromise: is it good—like friendship and peace—or is it bad, like timidity and spinelessness?

Superficially, it sounds silly to ask whether compromises are good or bad, much like asking whether bacteria are good

or bad: we cannot live without bacteria, though sometimes we die because of bacteria. Yet that asymmetry makes the question about the goodness and the badness of bacteria, as well as those of compromise, worth asking. We have ten times as many bacteria in our bodies as we have cells, and many of those are vital for our existence. A small number of bacteria are pathogenic and cause disease, and with the proper treatment, we may get rid of them. Similarly, compromises are vital for social life, even though some compromises are pathogenic. We need antibiotics to resist pathogenic bacteria, and we need to actively resist rotten compromises that are lethal for the moral life of a body politic.

Tension between Peace and Justice

I believe that beyond the ambivalence toward compromise and the spirit of compromise lurks a deep tension between peace and justice. Peace and justice may even demand two incompatible temperaments, one of compromise for the sake of peace, and the other of a Michael Kohlhaas-like bloody-mindedness, to let justice prevail, come what may.¹⁰ In the Hebrew Bible peace and justice live in harmony: "justice and peace kissed" (Psalm 85:11). By contrast, for dark Heraclitus, peace and justice live in disharmony: "Justice is strife."¹¹ The Talmud recognizes the tension between the two: "When there is strict justice there is no peace and where there is peace there is no strict justice."¹² The spirit of peace, for the Talmudists, is the spirit of compromise as manifested in arbitration; the spirit of justice—"Let justice pierce the mountain"¹³—is manifested in trial.¹⁴

Moses, in the eyes of the rabbis, incarnates the spirit of justice, and his brother Aaron incarnates the spirit of compromise and peace. Moses is admired. Aaron is loved.

The tension between peace and justice is at the center of this book; compromise is the go-between. I am particularly interested in the moral status of compromise made for the sake of peace at the expense of justice. How far can we go for peace by giving up on justice? Quite a distance, I say, but not the whole way. This is the short answer. My long answer is this whole book.

Declaring that two terms are in tension is often a way of muddying the waters and declaring them deep: tension between peace and justice needs elucidation. We tend to view peace and justice as *complementary* goods, like fish and chips, whereas in actuality peace and justice stand to each other as *competing* goods, like tea and coffee. The tension is due to the possibility of a trade-off between peace and justice: to gain peace, we may be forced to pay in justice.

Levi Eshkol, a former prime minister of Israel and a hero of mine, had the reputation of being a relentless compromiser; a tall story had it that when asked whether he would like tea or coffee, he answered, "Half and half," the idea being that the spirit of compromise may blind one to the fact of competing goods among which one has to choose. The trade-off between peace and justice is no laughing matter; it can be tragic, and the sense of this tragic choice pervades the book.

Not everyone agrees that peace and justice may collide. One objection to that view is the idea that peace is a constitutive part of justice and hence an essential component of justice: more peace is more justice. A different, yet related, view is that peace is only casually linked to justice: more peace may bring about more justice.¹⁵

This is not my view. An analogy may explain my position. Caffeine was regarded as essential to coffee, or at least as a contributing factor to coffee's main characteristic, that of be-

ing a stimulant. Removing caffeine from coffee was once inconceivable. But we can remove caffeine from coffee beans, thus creating a drink that competes with coffee: decaffeinated coffee. Peace is the caffeine of justice: it enhances justice. But peace, like decaffeinated coffee, can compete with justice. Between peace and justice there may exist a trade-off, much as between coffee and decaffeinated coffee. It is because of those situations of trade-off between peace and justice that I talk about tension between them.

Vacillating between Lasting Peace and Just Peace

Political philosophers have dealt with the notion of a lasting ("permanent") peace, but hardly ever with the notion of a just peace. This is so, perhaps, because philosophers feel that the idea of a just peace may be the enemy of the notion of just (i.e., simply) a peace, in the cliché sense according to which the best is the enemy of the good. It is preferable, in this view, to worry about the stability of peace than to worry about whether or not it is just. Another reason is, perhaps, that since both peace and peacemaking seem so good and just in and of themselves, there is no need for justification. But this explanation won't do. After all, most philosophers are not pacifists who believe that peace is justified at any price. Many thinkers maintain that there are just wars, which should be preferred to extremely unjust states of peace. To be sure, there is a difference between *just* peace and *justifiable* peace; not every injustice justifies going to war. Still, most thinkers would agree, some states of injustice justify war. Yet while there are many intensive debates about just and unjust wars, there are no parallel and independent debates about just and unjust peace.

Concern with Cruel Humiliation

The issue of cruel humiliation as a major moral concern looms large in my book *The Decent Society*. This time, I address extreme forms of humiliation, namely, humiliation combined with cruelty. I am concerned about humiliation as a loss of human dignity, rather than about social or national honor. But the sense of national humiliation plays an important political role in the effort to achieve compromise in the form of a peace agreement.

It seems that the orthopedic task of a peace treaty—to stiffen up the nation's posture—is almost impossible to achieve. A peace agreement by nature requires painful compromises, and there will always be those for whom any compromise is seen as shameful capitulation, those for whom dying "sword in hand" is preferable to accepting any compromise. But this in itself—the fact that some will always regard a peace treaty as capitulation—should not *morally* weigh heavily with the peacemakers. There is, however, a related consideration, the *moral* consideration of honor and humiliation, that any peace treaty should take into account.

The Munich Syndrome

It was Isaiah Berlin who initiated me into the topic of compromise and rotten compromise by conveying to me a strong sense of the importance of the spirit of compromise in politics, but also by conveying the formative experience of his generation: the Munich agreement as a definitive rotten compromise.

The appeasement trauma never left Berlin and his generation. For a few days during the Suez campaign of 1956, Eden's

obsession with appeasement resonated with Berlin, as did his idea that if Nasser were not stopped, he might become unstoppable—only until he realized that the analogy between the real Hitler and the Mussolini-on-the-Nile was an analogy gone wild.

We were discussing the Suez affair and I complained indignantly of the misuse of the Munich agreement by paranoid politicians: those who see Chamberlain's umbrella, the symbol of defeatism, everywhere.

Berlin admitted as much and added a story. A man was seen banging fiercely on top of a whistling boiling kettle. "What are you doing?" the man was asked. "I can't stand steam locomotives." "But this is a kettle, not a locomotive." "Yes, yes, I know, but you have to kill them when they are still young."

I suspect that the often-used analogy of appeasing Nasser as Mussolini-on-the-Nile, or Saddam as Hitler-on-the-Tigris, is of the kettle-as-young-locomotive kind.

As much as I want to use the Munich agreement as the paradigm case for a rotten compromise, I am acutely aware of its obnoxious role in political propaganda.

As for Berlin, what may have kept his appeasement trauma at bay was a deeply held belief (which he shared with his mentor, the historian H.A.L. Fisher) that history is "one damn thing after another." Hence there is no room for reading history as a series of prefigurations, with one figure—say, Hitler—heralding another figure in the future, and every compromise covered by Chamberlain's umbrella. The issue of compromise was for Berlin the flip side of the golden coin of moral courage and integrity. His personal fear was that his tendency to seek compromise was a sign of timidity. Yet he set as high a premium on compromise as did Edmund Burke in his celebrated speech of March 22, 1775, on the

question of conciliation with America: "All government—indeed every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue and every prudent act—is founded on compromise and barter."¹⁶ By barter, I presume, Burke meant give-and-take. For Burke, too, compromise is not just a matter of politics but one of personal strategy. But then it seems that compromise is one of those values both necessary and impossible. Moreover, it is necessary and impossible precisely when it matters most—namely, when, for the sake of peace, we have to compromise justice.

This leads me to a related lifelong concern of Isaiah Berlin that made a deep impression on me: his famous insistence that values may conflict with one another and cannot be reduced to one another. Berlin rejoiced in the clash of values as an expression of human variety, even when he saw the tragic side of such clashes. I can almost hear him say, with Walt Whitman-like exuberance, "In holding the values we do, we do contradict ourselves. Very well then, we contradict ourselves. But then we are large and contain multitudes."

The clash, or the apparent clash, at the center of political thought is that between freedom and equality. I believe the clash that should bother us most is that between peace and justice.

The Concern with the Passive Side

A typical rotten compromise has two sides: one is the perpetrator of a regime of cruelty and humiliation, and the other is a passive participant, merely lending its support to such a regime by signing the agreement. I am concerned with the perspective of the passive side. With the evil perpetrator, the rotten compromise is the least of the evil things it does.

Its rottenness lies in actually establishing and maintaining an inhuman regime, a regime of systematic cruelty and humiliation. But the rottenness of the passive side is in lending support to the active side. It is the British passive side in the Munich agreement that interests me, not the Nazi active side. The Nazi regime is rotten not so much for the agreement it signed, as for creating the reality that made the treaty rotten.

In the case in which both sides to the agreement are perpetrators of cruelty and humiliation—as, for example, in the case of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of August 23, 1939, also known as the Hitler-Stalin pact—the issue is not the rottenness of the pact itself but of their very cruel deeds.

The Choice between Stalin and Hitler

One large issue still remains to be covered: what about a passive side (say, Churchill) having an agreement with one perpetrator (Stalin) against another (Hitler)? Is such an agreement rotten? This is a rather misleading presentation of the choice, since Germany invaded Russia. It was not, simply, a choice out of compromise of siding with one perpetrator against the other. But still the issue of choosing between the two stood before Churchill.

The choice was not an issue of the lesser evil, but a choice between radical evil and evil, Hitler being the radical evil. In any case, I felt the need to deal with morally comparing Stalinism and Hitlerism.

Personally I find this particular comparison painful to carry out. I am keenly aware that the heroism and the sacrifice of the Red Army and of the Soviet civilians, more than anything else, brought about the defeat of Nazi Germany. Moreover, as a Jew, I am intensely conscious that many Jews

were rescued by the Red Army, regardless of the still-open question whether the Soviets made a special effort to rescue Jews during the evacuation of 1941. The claim of a special decree by the Kremlin to give priority to the evacuation of the Jewish population during the rapid advancement of the German army may be nothing more than a propaganda myth. But it is not a myth that many Jews, with or without priority, were saved, thanks to the Soviets, among them, devastatingly, only a very few members of my large extended family. Like many others, I feel an immense gratitude toward Soviet Russia for its role in saving the world from Hitler. I believe that the effort to belittle the Soviets' role in the defeat of Germany is despicable. Yet, in the context of prewar Europe, the moral question for someone like Churchill of whether to side with Stalin or with Hitler, both ruling over cruel and humiliating regimes, should be addressed. Indeed, I undertake a moral comparison of the two in the book's conclusion.

The moral significance of the Second World War is a topic I endlessly discussed with Stuart Hampshire. The war was his formative experience, and he convinced me that it should also be at the center of my generation's thinking. Hampshire had perfect pitch for moral ambiguities. I tried, perhaps by osmosis, to learn from him not just the sense of the twentieth century but also its sensibility.

If the book enunciates a firm admonition against making rotten compromises, it also sends a word of warning against a bloody-minded uncompromising cast of mind—the mind of the sectarian. I received a stiff warning of that kind myself from no less a figure than Irving Howe. It made a lasting impression on me. Here is the story of my first meeting with Howe, which ended with a warning.

In the gloomy days following the 1973 Yom Kippur War, a delegation of intellectuals from the United States came to

Jerusalem and stayed at the illustrious King David Hotel. There were no visitors in Israel at the time, and these were perhaps the first to arrive after the war and just before the elections. I was on the slate of a tiny peace party on the left called *Moked*. We knew almost all our voters by name. The quality of the support was never in doubt—it was the party of the intelligentsia—but the numbers were very much in question.

In the event, we got a single seat in the Knesset out of 120. The party advocated a two-state solution, Israel and Palestine. During those Golda Meir days, the mere mention of a Palestinian state was a heresy that guaranteed for its adherents a place in the frozen lake of Dante's ninth circle of hell. The frozen lake has melted since then. The idea of two states has now become an Israeli consensus, one that many Israelis express in public, but that not enough Israelis believe in private.

Ariel Sharon, the commander of my unit in that war, was at the time the great unifier of the Right. He forced Begin's party and the General Zionist Party to form an election bloc—the bloc that later succeeded in bringing Begin to power. Against army regulations, Sharon started campaigning for this bloc while still in uniform. Worried that Sharon would set about stirring things up in the army, the government ordered that anyone listed on a party's slate be immediately released from service duty for the duration of the election campaign. So, along with Sharon, I found myself released from active service, and headed from the Suez Canal back to Israel proper.

On the day I arrived home in Jerusalem, I was assigned to meet that delegation from the United States at the King David Hotel, to present to them the ideas of our *Moked* party, as other parties were presenting their own ideas. I was relatively young and very angry, so I guess I gave the speech of an angry young man, believing then, as I still do now, that it was Golda

Meir's government that had brought upon us that horrendous war. When it was all over, two people approached me: "My name is Irving Howe." "My name is Michael Walzer." As both names rang a huge bell, I was surprised and impressed. Then Howe said to me, "I agree with a great deal of what you said. But why do you promote a party that has no chance of winning elections? Why don't you join the Labor Party and change it from within? They will surely let you people be active among them. Sharon is doing politics; you are not." Then came the punch line. "Let me tell you. From my experience, the one thing you should avoid at all costs is becoming a sect. Sectarian politics is a terrible waste. I feel that you are in danger of becoming sectarian, as I was in my youth." I sensed that Irving Howe had said something disturbingly important. In all the years since, I have been haunted by Irving's commandment: Thou shall not be sectarian. Sectarian politics is the opposition to the spirit of compromise.

Chapter 6 is an effort to describe the cast of mind Howe warned me against.

So here is the telegraphic message of the book: On the whole, political compromises are a good thing. Political compromises for the sake of peace are a very good thing. Shabby, shady, and shoddy compromises are bad but not sufficiently bad to be always avoided at all costs, especially not when they are concluded for the sake of peace. Only rotten compromises are bad enough to be avoided at all costs. But then, rotten compromises are a mere tiny subset of the large set of possible political compromises.

I tried to shape the book in discursive lecturing style, informal, anecdotal, autobiographical, only lightly footnoted, with a direct appeal to the listener, as "you" rather than an indirect formal appeal to "the reader." The danger of this lecture style

is in tilting the balance between the rhetorical and the logical in favor of the rhetorical. In philosophy, this is a serious danger. When it comes to ethics, the rhetorical may turn into sermonizing, the danger being not in disregarding the truth, but in disregarding arguments and distinctions. I try to argue by making distinctions, hoping to keep away from sermonizing as much as I can.

Whether I succeeded is for you to judge.

TWO PICTURES OF POLITICAL COMPROMISE

Appeasement

ON SEPTEMBER 29, 1938, Hitler, Chamberlain, Daladier, and Mussolini met in Munich and reached an agreement to transfer from Czechoslovakia to Germany the Sudetenland, a narrow strip of land populated by ethnic Germans. In return, Hitler promised not to make any further territorial demands on Europe. In March 1939, the German army seized all of Czechoslovakia; the rest is history, horrendous history.

The Munich agreement became the symbol of a rotten compromise, a compromise one should not sign under any circumstances. "Appeasement" became the label for the policy that led to the Munich agreement. Since the agreement was perceived as rotten, the term "appeasement" went through a total readjustment: it lost its positive sense of bringing calm and peace and came to mean surrendering to the demands of a bully just because he is a bully. "Appeaser" became a term synonymous with "delusional person"—one who feeds a crocodile, hoping it will eat him last, a saying attributed to Churchill.

Is the Munich agreement in fact a clear case of a rotten compromise? Was the Munich agreement the outcome of a compromise? A preliminary effort to answer these two

questions will give us a handle on the general concern of my book, namely, what is the distinction between a compromise and a rotten compromise, a compromise one should not accept under any circumstances?

For an agreement to be a compromise, the parties to the agreement should make mutual concessions. One of the criticisms of the Munich agreement is that Hitler made no concessions on his part, aside, perhaps, from vague promises to refrain from further territorial demands on Europe. Another criticism is that the agreement was nothing but an act of coercion by Germany, and coercion is no compromise.

Churchill, later to be lionized, roared against the agreement by raising these two lines of criticism. In his House of Commons speech (October 5, 1938) he used the following analogy: "One pound was demanded at pistol's point. When it was given, two pounds were demanded at pistol's point. Finally, the dictator consented to take one pound, seventeen shillings and six pence, and the rest in promises of good will for the future."¹ In my opinion, the proverbial "pistol's point" refers to coercion rather than to compromise; the retreat in demand from two pounds to £1 17s 6d tells us that Hitler's insignificant concession amounts to no concession at all. So the Munich agreement, as Churchill understood it, was not a compromise but a total surrender: Hitler bullied Chamberlain and Chamberlain capitulated.

There is no question that the Munich agreement involved coercion. But that coercion was exerted on Czechoslovakia—a victim of the agreement, not a party to it. As for Britain and France, it is more accurate to describe them as compromising at the expense of Czechoslovakia than to see them as giving in to a direct coercive threat.²

The relation between compromise and coercion, as we shall see, is pretty convoluted. But one thing is clear-cut: the

closer it is to a case of compromise, the further it is from coercion. Yet it is conceptually possible for an agreement to be a clear case of rotten compromise, and not a clear case of compromise, much as a clear case of a lapsed Catholic is not a clear case of a Catholic. Nevertheless, a rotten compromise *is* a compromise, unlike a rotten stone that is powder and not stone.³

The question of whether the Munich agreement is a compromise is linked to, though not determined by, the question of whether the Munich agreement was coercive toward Britain or France. Coercion, unlike compulsion, involves threats. In the absence of threat, there is no coercion. To evaluate coercion, I maintain, we should adopt the subjective viewpoint of the one presumably threatened. The justification for accepting the subjective viewpoint is that coercion, unlike compulsion, hinges on a communicative act of threatening. The victim should understand the act of threatening as having a coercive effect, and the way the prospective victim understands the situation is crucial.

As far as Britain is concerned, those who signed the Munich agreement did not perceive it as yielding to a coercive threat, but as a genuine compromise. As far as I know, Chamberlain never claimed that he was coerced to sign the agreement, and there is no reason to suppose that he defended his stand in bad faith. The Munich agreement, according to the subjective test, is a compromise. But is it a rotten compromise?

The Munich agreement is a rotten compromise, not predominantly because of its contents, but because it was Hitler who signed it. Imagine that instead of the dreadful Hitler, it was the dignified Walther Rathenau who made demands on Sudetenland. Imagine that he made those demands on behalf of the Weimar Republic, in the name of the Sudeten Germans' right to self-determination, arguing that Czechoslovakia, true

to its name, meant to serve only two peoples—seven million Czechs and two million Slovaks—showing a complete disregard for the three million Sudeten Germans' forced inclusion in Czechoslovakia. Even if we believe that argument to be flawed—for it means, among other things, that Czechoslovakia had to give up its natural and man-made defenses against Germany—it is still a moral argument and by no means a rotten one.

So if the content of the agreement is not shamefully rotten, what is? It cannot be the motive for signing the agreement that makes it rotten. There was nothing shameful in Chamberlain's yearning for peace as a motive for signing the agreement. Even Churchill, not a great fan of Chamberlain, recognized his sincerity: "No one has been a more resolute and uncompromising struggler for peace than the Prime Minister."⁴ So the purity of Chamberlain's peace-seeking motive was never in dispute.

The agreement cannot be rotten just because it was based on an error in political judgment—putting Britain's trust in the hands of a serial betrayer—for that is an empirical blunder, not a moral sin. So what is rotten in the Munich pact? My answer is that the one with whom it was signed, and not what was signed, makes it rotten. A pact with Hitler was a pact with radical evil, evil as an assault on morality itself. Not recognizing Hitler as radically evil was a moral failure on top of a bad error of political judgment.

True, Hitler in 1938 was not the Hitler of the war years. But what Nazism stood for should have already been clear in the thirties: it stood for radical evil. By that, I mean not just committing evil but trying to eradicate the very idea of morality—by actively rejecting the premise on which morality is predicated, namely, our shared humanity. Virulent global Nazi racism was a total effort to eliminate the sense

of shared humanity, so to compromise with Hitler was to compromise with someone who undermined morality itself. It was right, morally right, for the Allies to declare an all-out war on Germany, and to proclaim any effort to come to terms with Nazi Germany as basically rotten.

Not every agreement with Hitler's regime is rotten by definition. For example, had the deal offered to the Allies by Adolf Eichmann on behalf of the SS's highest authorities been accepted, bartering for the lives of a million Hungarian Jews by supplying Nazi Germany with ten thousand trucks for civilian use, I would not have considered its acceptance by the Allies rotten. Such a deal would have saved human beings from humiliation and death under Hitler's regime. (I shall return to the "Blood for Trucks" deal in chapter 4.)

My Concerns

I started with the example of Munich to pave the way for my two concerns: compromise and peace. A moral distinction must be drawn between compromise and rotten compromise—a compromise one should avoid under any circumstances. It is, I believe, a fitting distinction. It should help us sort out the relation between peace and justice.

As I mentioned in the introduction when I presented my interest in justified peace, I am interested first and foremost in political compromise: compromise between groups and states rather than compromise between individuals. Rotten individual compromises, personal "pacts with the devil," concern me here only as they pertain to individuals who negotiate for a collective—say, Neville Chamberlain in Munich, or the "great compromiser" Roger Sherman of Connecticut, rather than Dr. Faustus in his personal pact with the devil. In

fact, individuals are going to play central roles in my court of history. I shall present individuals making compromises that strongly reflect on them personally, but in these cases the compromise under review will be a political compromise, on behalf of a collective.

In what follows I use from time to time examples of personal pacts, but I use them as useful analogies to political pacts, and not as a subject that stands on its own.

Two Pictures

The idea of political compromise is caught between two pictures of politics: politics as economics and politics as religion. Roughly speaking, in the economic picture of politics everything is subject to compromise. Compromise is not always desirable or prudent, but it is always possible. In the religious picture, there are things over which we must never compromise.

The religious picture is in the grip of the idea of the holy. The holy is not negotiable, let alone subject to compromise. Crudely put, one cannot compromise over the holy without compromising the holy. Conversely, in the economic picture of politics, compromise is at the heart of politics, and the ability to compromise is highly praised. That politics is the art of compromise is a tired cliché. Economic life is based on the idea of substitution: one good can be replaced by another, and this enables exchanges in the market. Exchanges leave room for negotiation, and where there is room for negotiation, there is room for compromise. Compromise has an internal relation to what is exchangeable and divisible.

Economic products serving as the model for politics make it seem as if compromise is always possible. Not so with re-

ligion. However, religions, by which I mean religious institutions and religious states, make political compromises all the time; they routinely develop elaborate justifications and techniques to carry out their compromises. The politics of the holy leaves plenty of room for compromise in matters profane. It may in practice even be engaged in compromise in matters holy, but the logic of the holy as an ideal type is the negation of the idea of compromise.

Modern politics is seized by these two irreconcilable pictures. There is, of course, nothing surprising about secular modern states' being subject to the economic picture. But surprisingly, yet nevertheless true, modern secular states are still under the spell of the religious picture. Thus, for example, the French constitution (1958) declares France to be secular, but not before it declares France to be "indivisible."⁵ The same goes for the expression "indivisible nation" in the American Pledge of Allegiance. In both cases the choice of the expression "indivisible" is no accident. It has strong religious underpinnings—it is one of God's attributes that informs the picture of an indivisible France and an indivisible United States as absolute entities without legitimate fractions. Thus no claim of secession is acceptable as legitimate because these two entities have no legitimate fractions. To compromise over the Union is to betray the Union in the same way that the idolater betrays the oneness of God.

The religious picture fills politics with the idea that politics is a domain of human activity meant to protect a way of life and give meaning to human life. It is the antithesis of the economic picture, concerned with satisfying desires and interests, not with meanings.

The two pictures—the religious and the economic—evinces two different sets of motivations to explain political life. The economic picture, even if not strictly hedonic, still explains

human behavior in terms of satisfying preferences, whereas the religious picture brings the willingness for self-sacrifice into the picture. A key mistake in political thought lies in disregarding the workings of either of the two pictures, in the belief that only one of the pictures sustains politics.

Not just politics is in the grip of the two pictures, the religious and the economic; this also holds true for morality itself. Utilitarian morality is clearly subject to the economic picture. The competing Kantian morality that promotes absolute moral imperatives irrespective of their consequences is molded on the picture of absolute religious commandments. We are ambivalent in evaluating compromise precisely because we are in the grip of two imprecise, powerful, and irreconcilable pictures of both politics and morality.

Forbidden Trade-off between Scarcity and Sacredness

Economics deals predominantly with the allocation of scarce resources. I use "predominantly" advisedly, since economics should also deal with unemployment, a case where labor is not scarce (this in a way is Keynes's amendment to the view that economics is the science of scarce resources, and only scarce resources). There are two stages in the allocation of scarce resources: production and exchange. Production transforms the commodity, whereas exchange transfers the control over it. The point of an exchange is that different agents value different things, in terms of other things, differently: for me, one avocado is worth two apples, whereas for you it is worth four apples. So we can both be better off by exchanging things I value less for things you value more. If I give you my avocado for three apples, I am better off by one apple and you are better off by one apple. That is all too banal to be worth

spelling out. Not banal at all, of course, are the ways in which things would be allocated such that no one would be able to improve one's lot by further exchange. Getting to an optimal allocation is the concern of the economist.

However, a whole chain of thoughts and attitudes that I link to the religious picture of politics forbids various kinds of economic exchanges. I am concerned with cases in which the very exchange is taboo because there is something degrading, if not sacrilegious, in the implicit comparison of the things that stand for exchange. To exchange what is sacred for money is, in the religious picture, the most debasing of exchanges.

Money, being a universal medium of exchange, is the "lowest" common denominator of all things, so selling the sacred for money is debasing the sacred more than any other exchange. The point is that in every exchange there is an explicit comparison between the items being exchanged—what one thing is worth in terms of another. Money as a universal medium of exchange claims that anything can be compared to anything.

A distinction should be drawn between *incomparable* and *incommensurable*.⁶ Two things are incommensurable if they cannot be compared in quantitative terms (as we compare heights, for example); two things are incomparable if there are no qualitative terms to compare them. Incomparable is an expression of high praise. The God of the monotheistic religions claims this status of being absolutely incomparable. Things devoted to the deity (i.e., sacred things) claim by implication a similar status of incomparability.

Extending the market model to all spheres of life makes everything comparable to everything else and thus potentially leads to insulting comparisons. Those who adhere to the economic picture might say that indeed it is this feature of money—the great equalizer in the marketplace—that

those who criticize the market economy for creating inequality miss so terribly.

The celebrated fictional exchange—

Scott Fitzgerald. The rich are different from you and me.

Ernest Hemingway. Yes, they have more money⁷—

is, nevertheless, a telling anecdote.

Money is a great equalizer because it reduces many differences and distinctions to one commensurate dimension. It enables fewer privileges based on qualitative differences that are not for sale. Aristocracy in its heyday was such a society, until titles of nobility became available for sale to the aspiring rich. It is mainly the snob, argues the marketer, who promotes the view that money, as the great equalizer, breeds vulgarity and loss of sense of value by comparing the incomparable.

Oscar Wilde's hilarious exchange in *Lady Windermere's Fan* captures in a cartoonist's exaggerated way the main divide between the two pictures: the economic and the religious, or, in Wilde's language, between the cynics and the sentimentalist.

Lord Darlington. What cynics you fellows are!

Cecil Graham. What is a cynic?

Lord Darlington. A man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Cecil Graham. And a sentimentalist, my dear Darlington, is a man who sees an absurd value in everything, and doesn't know the market price of any single thing.⁸

The point of the whole discussion about forbidden trade-offs is that sorting out the difference between compromises and rotten compromises is part of a larger scheme of rendering certain trade-offs as taboo. The psychology of taboo trade-off is addressed expertly by Alan Fiske and Philip Tet-

lock.⁹ They try to identify the conditions under which we are likely to treat trade-offs as taboo.

In my view, the religious picture in general, and the religious picture of politics in particular, is the source of our sense of forbidden trade-offs. The economic picture, on the other hand, loosens the hold of the religious picture that renders trade-offs taboo. The claim that there is a taboo on trading what one holds sacred is riddled with ambiguity: the thing that is tabooed does not have to be the thing that is sacred; it might even be anathema. When Jews and Muslims taboo pork, they do not hold swine as sacred; what they hold sacred is the will of God as expressed in the prohibition against eating pork. Turning the swine into a taboo means that not eating pork trumps everything else. The observant is not allowed to eat a tiny piece of pork for the largest amount of anything else. It is no good telling the observant that if you eat a tiny bit of pork, you will receive all the chocolate you want. He should refuse the offer. Indeed he should refuse to eat the tiny bit of pork for all the treasures of the world.

Not eating pork is nonnegotiable or almost so. (In Judaism one is allowed to eat pork to save one's life. Refraining from eating pork in Judaism does not trump saving one's life.) My point, however, is that taboo has the logic of a trumping relation. Even the tiniest piece of *A* should not be exchanged for the biggest amount of *B*.¹⁰ We may distinguish between relative and absolute taboos. *A* is a relative taboo with regard to a particular kind of *B* if *A* trumps *B* (no tiny bit of *A* is allowed to be traded off for a huge chunk of *B*.) An absolute taboo is a taboo that stands in this relation to everything else.

Now that the framing of the issue of taboo trade-off is within view, I shall contrast the attitude of the two pictures in greater detail with an eye to their historical changes.

What Should Money Not Buy?

Here is a celebrated example from *The Merchant of Venice*: Antonio receives a loan from Shylock, three thousand ducats for three months; should he fail to repay, Shylock is entitled to cut a pound of his flesh, in what part of the body he chooses. Flesh for money is taboo. In Shakespeare's play, however, quite surprisingly, Antonio, who has in the past humiliated Shylock (spat in public upon his "Jewish gabardine"), finds Shylock's offer generous, since Shylock does not charge him interest on the loan. ("I'll seal to such bond, And say there is much kindness in the Jew.")¹¹ For Antonio, usury, paying money on money, is abhorrent, but apparently not the mortgaging of flesh for money. We, however, are quite horrified by the deal. One can exchange meat for money but not one's flesh. Flesh, like other organs, can be donated for a good cause but not sold. I hasten to say that not all of us feel that way: libertarians think that there is nothing wrong in selling human organs. We are the owners of our bodies, and it is up to us to decide what to do with its parts.

The libertarian is not a cynic but is influenced by the economic picture to the extent that any transaction between consenting adults is allowed. We shall shortly meet the libertarian again.

For the Catholic Antonio, usury is an economic taboo; charging interest on loans is regarded nowadays as the core transaction of a market economy. So what is taboo in economic exchanges is subject to historical changes. Let me venture to explain the taboo on usury. I am not vouching for the validity of my explanation but only allude to the kind of explanation needed.

In a market economy, not being able to repay a loan might legally, in the worst case, result in bankruptcy. By

contrast, in the Bible or Quran economy, being unable to repay a loan might have meant slavery. Already, merely asking for a loan meant not being able to be helped by one's family, and it was a sign of the plight of being poor and surrounded by impoverished kith and kin. Aggravating the situation of the debtor by demanding interest was perceived as pushing the debtor toward slavery. If this is the right way to explain the source of the taboo on charging a fee on the use of money, we can see why the Quran considered usury as a pact with the devil: "Those who charge usury are in the same position as those controlled by the devil's influence" (Al-Baqarah 2:275). A loan should be a charitable act, a gift, not an economic exchange. A charitable gift should have only intrinsic value and should not be bought for money, since money is the embodiment of that which has only exchange value.

Religious blessing is a paradigmatic case of a charitable gift, and a charitable gift is not for sale. Note the following exchange taken from Acts 8:

8:18. And when Simon saw that, by the imposition of the hands of the apostles, the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,

8:19. Saying: Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I shall lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said to him:

8:20. Keep thy money to thyself, to perish with thee: because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

Indeed, simony, the crime of buying office in the church, is named after Simon Magus, who offered money in exchange for the power to bestow blessings. Simony and the abuse of indulgence (remission of temporal punishment for money)

became the symbols of religious corruption: sale of salvation for money. ("As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs.") Luther made a major grievance of the abuse of this kind of worldly transaction, debasing what has intrinsic value by turning it into exchange value.

All this is pure religion, but here is a dramatic political example of a heated public debate centered on the issue of taboo trade-off shaped by the religious view of politics. The transaction was memory of blood for money. On September 10, 1952, Israel and West Germany signed an accord, the Reparations Agreement, according to which Germany had to pay Israel for their persecution of the Jews during the Holocaust.

Before and after the signature of the agreement, nothing divided the Jews in Israel more than the Reparations Agreement. It was only seven years after the destruction of European Jewry, and the nightmarish memory of the war was still as haunting as ever. The great advocate of the agreement was David Ben-Gurion; his opposition came from both the Left and the Right. One of the arguments in favor of the agreement was couched in the biblical saying "Have you murdered and also taken possession?" The source of this saying is the story of Naboth the Jezreelite (1 Kings 21), who refused to sell his vineyard to Ahab and was killed by a plot hatched by Jezebel, Ahab's wicked wife, which resulted in her husband's taking possession of the vineyard. The prophet Elijah then admonished Ahab with God's words "Have you murdered and also taken possession?" The analogy meant not only that Nazi Germany had killed the Jews, but also that they should not be allowed to enjoy the stolen Jewish property without providing compensation. On this account, the trade-off is compensation for possession and for the harm done to the enslaved Jewish laborers in the Nazi machine, and not forgiveness for the murder of six million Jews. The point was

that no trade-off taboo was violated. The opposition from the Right, led by Menachem Begin, proclaimed the slogan "Our honor shall not be sold for money. Our blood shall not be atoned for goods. We shall erase the shame."¹² Selling the memory of the murdered for money: that's how the opposition depicted the Reparations Agreement.

The Libertarian and the Cynic View of What Is Rotten

In the libertarian view, any agreement and any transaction among consenting adults that does not vitiate the rights of third parties is never morally rotten. Compromise as a clear case of agreement between consenting adults is never rotten, if it leaves the rights of third parties intact. Consenting adults may agree on incestuous relations, on selling and buying human organs, on polygamy and bondage sex, on selling and buying sex, drugs, and what not—none of those is in and of itself morally objectionable, so long as the rights of third parties are not infringed. The libertarian admits that some people, perhaps most people, may find some or most of the above repulsive, but one should not confuse aesthetic revulsion with moral scruple. The libertarian, advocating rugged individualism, is interested chiefly in individual transactions rather than in collective agreements. But I guess that the same idea holds collectively for them, and agreement and any compromise among consenting collectives are acceptable as long as they are not at the expense of third parties—whether individuals or a collective. The libertarian does not push the economic picture to its limit; he disapproves of agreements that trample the rights of third parties against their will. A rotten compromise, in the libertarian view, can occur only in an agreement carried out at the expense of the rights of third parties. And

just as between consenting adults, anything goes between willing collectives, and there are no taboos on trade-off.

To a willing person no injury is done, says the Latin maxim (*Volenti non fit injuria*), consenting bystanders included. This holds true for a boxer badly injured in a fight, who had expressly agreed to inflict and suffer pain; it is also true for a spectator at a baseball game who cannot complain if a ball hits him while he sits in the bleachers: the spectator is, within reason, a consenting spectator.

For the cynic who fits Wilde's definition there are no rotten compromises, only good and bad deals; the language of rights prominent in the arsenal of the libertarian does not belong in the vocabulary of the cynic. There are many cynics in practice but only few, if any at all, in ideology. There are few libertarians in ideology, and even fewer in practice.

For our topic, the libertarian should address two questions: Would he accept a pact of consenting adults that establishes master-slave relations between them? Would the libertarian accept a pact between a consenting Marquis de Sade and a Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, to establish a regime of systematic humiliation and cruelty between them? In short, are slavery and a sadomasochistic free pact morally acceptable to the libertarian?

The libertarian may, whimsically yet tellingly, say that he accepts a slavery pact even though he regards it as utterly perverse, given that the highest value in human life should be freedom. But the libertarian may add that even a nonlibertarian text, the Hebrew Bible, allows consenting slavery on the part of someone who declares, "I love my master."

The case of a permanent voluntary slavery pact is in our world rather fanciful. However, radical feminists may describe women staying in oppressive marriages as not unlike the biblical Hebrew slave who declares, "I love my master,"

not out of love to the master himself, but out of love for his own wife and children.¹³

They may shy away from faulting the women in such cases, yet they view a semivoluntary marriage pact as rotten. They would argue that woman's oppression in marriage is the primordial form of oppression, and the base for all other forms of oppression; slavery is only one historical form of such oppression; the oppression of the slave woman in the biblical example says it all. In such radical feminist views, the family is a political entity that makes the marriage agreement rotten, not only a personally rotten pact, but also a politically rotten pact. I don't know whether any radical feminist has used this rather far-fetched analogy, but I can see that a radical feminist would not find it so far-fetched.

A libertarian, who speaks in the name of freedom as the ultimate value in human life, is to my mind in a double bind. He may bite the bullet and say that if someone freely gives his consent to a pact of slavery, one has to accept it, even if slavery is the denial of the ultimate value. Or he may say that since his moral system is predicated on adult free consent, slavery that renounces free consent thus renounces the basis on which the libertarian system is erected. So for the sake of retaining a system based on adult consent, no adult consent can be given to giving up adult consent, which is what slavery is.

The psychology of sadomasochistic practices is hard to understand, and its phenomenology not easily accounted for. In my opinion, the question whether to label a voluntary sadomasochistic pact a rotten compromise depends not on whether it is voluntary, but on whether it establishes a systematic practice of cruelty and humiliation between the parties to the pact. The overt features of the practice seem that way—systematic infliction of serious pain accompanied by overt

gestures of humiliation. Yet there is a distinct feeling that an S&M pact, a pact limited in time, is actually a charade. Indeed, the element of charade is what turns the sadomasochistic deal into a compromise.

The inflicted pain is real enough; it is not, however, an expression of cruelty but rather an intense, if perverse, erotic arousal. The gestures of humiliation, in turn, are more a parody than an expression of cruelty. The relations of domination and submission expressed in such meetings are in the final analysis controlled by the submissive and the humiliated ones. They can stop it whenever they wish. And this is the compromise.

In short, revolting as these practices appear to most of us, they do not amount to a regime of cruelty and humiliation, and their meaning (if this is the word) is misconstrued if they are taken as such. So the question is: how serious is the practice of S&M? Seriousness, here, is not measured by pain. What makes it serious is the meaning of the pain. The question then is this: is the S&M practice an expression of cruel humiliation, or is it a mock expression of cruel humiliation, for erotic satisfaction?

The libertarian is indifferent to my question. He makes up his mind and decides that if the practice is between consenting adults, it is not rotten. For me, if the practice is indeed a manifestation of cruelty and humiliation, it is rotten even if agreed upon by consenting adults, whether in personal relations, or in collective relations.

Two Observations

The economic picture of politics is framed by two very broad observations: one by Hume and the other by Adam Smith.

Hume's observation starts with a reminder. Look at nature and see how lions fare in comparison to human beings. Lions have bodies impressively adapted to their life—they are majestically strong and remarkably agile—whereas we naked apes called humans look quite pathetic. Yet in the animal kingdom humans and not lions are kings.¹⁴

What accounts for this brilliant human success? Hume's answer is that humans, unlike lions, are wonderfully capable of cooperating in many varied and flexible ways: leonine cooperation, unlike human cooperation, is rigidly confined to a few tasks. In the language of Hume, human cooperation is artificial, based on dispositions sensitive to social conventions, and not on fixed innate dispositions that Hume calls natural. The artificial disposition to cooperate, which may vary from society to society, requires trust. Trust is enshrined in the institution of promise, which in turn is the cement of social life. Compromise, which etymologically derives from co-promises or mutual promises, is cooperation based on mutual promises.

Smith's observation is as follows: human beings compete over goods produced out of scarce resources. Competition means that agents who strive to gain scarce goods cannot all have them to their full satisfaction. Scarcity is a necessary condition for competition. Scarce but undesirable objects are not subject to competition. We desire diamonds, or at least some of us do. We do not desire ashes. In the absence of any desire for ashes, even in a world that holds small amounts of them, ashes go to ashes—they are not subject to competition as diamonds are. Ashes may be rare without being scarce. Rarity is a fact of nature; scarcity is a social fact. Scarcity is what turns something into an economic or a political good—a good subject of competition. Competition is built into the very idea of economic and political goods.

CHAPTER 1

Hume's and Smith's observations are far-reaching and vague. They were not the first to make these observations, but perhaps the first to understand their full implication: namely, that the fundamental problem of human political life is how to address the tension between cooperation and competition: compromise is an essential element in relieving this tension.

A Very Short Summary

A helpful map not only gives you the layout of the land but tells you with a conspicuous sign, "You are here." So where are we? We are grappling with two pictures of politics: the religious picture and the economic picture. From the religious picture we get a strong sense that some things are not exchangeable. There is an absolute taboo on some transactions. I gave various examples of such taboo trade-offs, mostly dealing with money as a debasing medium of exchange. Some are directly related to religious practices, and others are inspired by religious practices.

The idea of rotten compromises as compromises that should be subjected to absolute taboos ties in with this picture. The economic picture sanctions no exchanges in absolute terms. In this view, there exist irrational exchanges, but when performed voluntarily by responsible adults, all such exchanges are allowed; none are absolutely taboo.

So where are we on this map? When the map is politics, we are left with one absolute taboo on exchanges. Its contours will be drawn in the next chapter.

CONCLUSION

BETWEEN EVIL AND RADICAL EVIL



FROM THE REALITY of recent sectarian wars and civil wars, we return to the formative event of the Second World War and its antecedents. The issue is simple. If having an agreement with Hitler in Munich was rotten, was it also rotten to side with Stalin against Hitler?

Note that siding with one rotten regime against an aggressor, as in the case of Nazi Germany invading the Soviet Union, is not exactly signing an agreement that can technically be rendered rotten. It was not a compromise: it was collaboration against a common enemy, which was unmistakably the aggressor. However, the decision to side with one rotten regime against the other raises questions that bear directly on the issue of the nature of rotten compromises. So I shall treat the issue of siding with the Soviet Union as an issue about rotten compromise, acknowledging that it is not technically so.

"The Russian Revolution and the National Socialist ascendancy in Germany are the two most important sources of evidence of moral philosophy in our time, as the French Revolution was for Hegel and Marx, and later to Tocqueville and for Mill. Although both revolutions produced, both in intention and in effect, a triumph on a gigantic scale, there are often marked differences between the evil effects planned and achieved."¹ This observation comes from Stuart Hampshire, a keen philosophical connoisseur of the twentieth century.

It is embarrassingly banal to say that these two historical events shook the world. But it is less banal, although true, to say that they created a change in the world order which in turn resulted in grave moral consequences. Both paved the way to unparalleled murderous regimes (especially if we view Mao's regime as connected, however indirectly, to the October Revolution).

It is injustice, not justice, that brings us into normative politics—despotism, not freedom. Moral political theory should start with negative politics, the politics that informs us on how to tackle evil before telling us how to pursue the good. Stalin's communism and Hitler's Nazism are perhaps the most glaringly dark examples, if I may be allowed the oxymoron, of evil. Thus negative moral politics should be informed by these two examples and should be able to provide us with the moral vocabulary adequate for coping with them. Indeed the way we judge these two examples, and especially the way we compare them, is a test case of how adequate our moral account is. This, in any case, is how I understand Stuart Hampshire's opening statement.

Morality, like wine tasting, calls for constant comparative judgments. Possibly, as Gilbert Ryle perhaps thought, as in the case of wine tasting, there is not much theory involved in morality, but only subtle variations of comparative judgments.² If a theory is to emerge from the efforts to make such comparative judgments coherent, it may be a little theory, not a grand one.

One crucial comparative judgment that tests such a moral theory and gives us a taste for it is the moral comparison identifying the lesser evil between Stalin's communism and Hitler's Nazism. Note that I do not submit for comparison generic communism and generic fascism. I do not offer, say, Pol Pot compared to Generalissimo Franco. Already the

moral comparison between the regimes of Hitler and Stalin is burdened with the fact that Hitler ruled for twelve years whereas Stalin ruled twice as long. What does that double span mean? Should we compare what Stalin actually did to what Hitler would have done, had he remained in power as long as Stalin did, or should we compare Stalin's deeds just to Hitler's actual deeds? I shall compare only facts to facts, and not facts to counterfactuals. So I shall compare Stalin's actual ruling to Hitler's actual ruling, even though we can easily imagine the moral havoc Hitler would have inflicted, had he ruled for double the time he actually did. But one thing is clear: the comparison between Stalin's regime and Hitler's regime is more focused and more confined and defined in space and time than is the general comparison between generic communism and generic fascism.

Churchill's Judgment

On June 21, 1941, at a dinner at Chequers, Churchill stated that Hitler was planning to attack Russia, relying on right-wing sympathies in Britain and the United States not to allow their governments to interfere. But Hitler is wrong, Churchill stated, and Britain will help Russia. After dinner, the issue of helping Russia came up again. Mr. Colville, Churchill's private secretary, asked him how he, Churchill, the arch anti-communist, could support Russia. Doesn't this support for Russia, he asked, amount to "bowing down in the House of Rimmon" (meaning, compromising his principles).³

Churchill's secretary alluded to the Aramaic military commander Na'aman who, after being cured of leprosy by the prophet Elijah, promised to worship God alone. But then, as an afterthought, Na'aman asked that he be excused in those

cases when he had to follow his master, the earthly king, and bow down to the Aramaic idol Rimmon. The prophet granted this request. Hence, in the biblical sense, bowing down in the House of Rimmon is recognized as a necessary compromise, not to be reproached.

This, in any case, is how I understand the question that Churchill was asked. His reply is vintage Churchill: "Not at all. I have only one purpose; the destruction of Hitler, and my life is much simplified thereby. If Hitler invaded Hell, I would make at least a favorable reference to the Devil in the House of Commons."⁴

The following day Churchill went on the air. In his speech he compared the two regimes. "The Nazi regime is indistinguishable from the worst features of Communism. It is devoid of all theme and principle except appetite and racial domination. It excels all forms of human wickedness in the efficiency of its cruelty and ferocious aggression. No one has been a more consistent opponent of Communism than I have for the last twenty-five years. I will unsay no word that I have spoken about it. But all this fades away before the spectacle which is now unfolding. The past, with its crimes, its follies, and its tragedies, flashes away."⁵ And then he went on to remark favorably on the devil Stalin. I believe that Churchill made the right moral choice in siding with Stalin against Hitler. This, I maintain, is true even according to our retrospective knowledge of Stalin's crimes, the extent of which presumably was unknown to Churchill.

There is no question that Stalin's worst crimes were committed in the years before the war, and that Hitler's worst crimes were committed during the war. When Churchill made his judgment, Stalin had already committed his worst, whereas Hitler was far from having done his worst yet. And yet I believe Churchill was right, not because Stalin's worst

was not up to Hitler's worse-than-worst, but because Hitler's evil was radical evil, undermining morality itself. Stalin's monstrous evil was different, and Churchill correctly sensed the difference when he said that Hitler stands for one thing: "racial domination." This is what I shall argue.

One may wonder whether my understanding of Churchill's choice is not an exercise in misguided moralism. This argument sees Churchill as having made a political judgment, not a moral one: he deemed Hitler more dangerous than Stalin to Britain and to the British Empire. I do not think so. Churchill obviously was concerned with the interests of Britain, as he understood them. And it is true that he judged Stalin less dangerous than Hitler, not just because Stalin in foreign affairs was the devil he knew whereas Hitler was the new devil. But Stalin's crimes were all inwardly directed, toward Russians, whereas Hitler's crimes were outwardly directed, to the enemies outside. Hitler was more dangerous to Britain than Stalin, who was rather prudent in his foreign policy.

This is all true. But I believe that in addition to Churchill's political judgment, there was a moral judgment. This is how I understand his reference to "Hell" and "the Devil" in his reply to his secretary. He invoked hell and the devil because he believed he had to make a moral choice, not just a political choice. However, my task is to assess not Churchill's sincerity but the soundness of his moral judgment.

Churchill made this judgment well into the war. But one of the first Gallup polls was conducted in the United States in January 1939, before the Second World War broke out. Americans were asked a rather poignant question: if war should break out between the Soviet Union and Germany, whom would they prefer to win? The tally was 83 percent favoring a Soviet victory, as against 17 percent for Germany.⁶ The Americans, like Churchill, were no friends of communism, and

yet, in comparing the two, they clearly opted for Russia as the lesser evil. I believe that, naive and unworldly as those Americans were, they correctly sensed that in Hitler's racism there was something more sinister than in Stalin's frightfulness. There is no question that by the time the poll was conducted, millions of people had already been murdered under Stalin. The politically caused famine of 1932–1933 alone brought about the death of some six million people. But even if we compare the “purges” that Stalin launched in the Communist Party to Hitler's in the National Socialist Party, Hitler by then had very little to show in comparison to Stalin's liquidation of 700,000 people in the Great Purge of 1937–1938.

The Devil's Accountant

Some languages have a curious arithmetic. They count, “One, two, three,” and then go on to “many”; above three, matters blur. Having been born in a relatively hot country, I believed that every temperature below zero Celsius is more or less the same—just very cold. Only after experiencing some cold winters abroad did I realize that -10°C feels very different from -20°C . When it comes to the numbers of people killed, we believe that above a certain threshold, it all blurs, that the number of the dead passes as “many.” But morally, numbers should count. Murdering two million people is twice as bad as murdering one million.

This does not mean that sheer numbers affect what impression the killing makes on us. In a curious way, the converse is almost true. The Romans crucified thousands upon thousands, but only one crucifixion—and that one for only three days—made such a momentous impression on humanity. More was written of the death of Anne Frank than of the

million and a half other Jewish children murdered in the Holocaust. Numbers register almost inversely to our ability to identify with the victims. Large numbers numb; individual stories make for vivid impressions. But moral arithmetic is not about impressions.

“A murder is a murder” is a deep tautology. Morally we should count all the murdered as equal. If so, to compare Stalin's regime to Hitler's regime, we just have to compare the number of people murdered by each. Of course, the two regimes committed other evil deeds, but these pale in comparison with mass murders. So let us stick to the numbers of the dead, if we agree that they were indeed murdered, not just killed.

On the principle that the life of each human counts as one, no less and no more, the cardinal evil of mass murder should be measured by cardinal numbers, and by cardinal numbers alone. Once murder has been determined, it is an additive function. In this view, we should not pay attention to other considerations and to other numbers; they all dim our moral judgment. We should not, for example, toy with ratios, such as the ratio of those murdered to the total population, or with counting children, or women, or the elderly. The relevant population is humanity at large and nothing else. Thus the ratio of the victims to the total population in Cambodia's Pol Pot massacre (one-fourth of the population), which is much higher than the ratio of the victims in Mao's China (about one-twelfth of the population), still does not place Pol Pot in Mao's league. Mao's regime was responsible for sixty-five million dead, as compared to a meager two million in Pol Pot's regime.⁷

In court (at least in some courts), a serial killer gets a string of life sentences according to the number of his or her victims. This is a symbolic token of the principle that murder

is murder and each life counts the same, all on an individual basis. Any other principle of evaluating the degree of evil in mass murder above and beyond the number of people killed is wrong. Genocide in this view is not more evil, *qua* murder, than murdering a comparable number of people not identified by religion or ethnic affiliation. Murdering, say, the Budapest Quartet is not more evil *qua* murder than murdering four people taken at random. The genocide of the Jews, and with it the destruction of their culture, should not count as more evil than the murdering of kulaks just because kulaks belonged not to a cultural group but merely to a bureaucratic category, previously imposed from above by Stolypin (1906). Genocide usually inflicts further evil consequences that may be lacking in an anonymous mass murder, such as the destruction of valuable forms of life, or—in the case of the Budapest Quartet—a terrible loss to music. But these further evils should not be compounded with the evil of murder.

What makes genocide a horrendous crime, however, above and beyond horrific indiscriminate mass killing, is that genocide is a manifestation of dismembering the idea of shared humanity. By targeting a specific category of human beings as creatures that do not deserve to live, genocide removes this category from humankind.

Jonathan Glover is undoubtedly correct in writing, "The numbers of people murdered by Stalin's tyranny far surpass those killed in the Nazi camps."⁸ But this comparison between the two is far from telling us the whole moral story. A great deal depends on who is responsible, in our opinion, for World War II victims in Europe. I put them on Hitler's account.

Does this mean that the 700,000 or so German civilians killed by the Allies' bombing of German cities should be added to Hitler's account? Is not Churchill himself accountable

for killing those German civilians? Should Russian soldiers fighting on a battlefield be counted as people murdered?

The moral counting of the dead in the Second World War is indeed not a straightforward matter, as the example of the German civilians killed by the Allies shows. Moreover, it sounds to me quite absurd to regard all of the German soldiers, many of whom were great enthusiasts of the Nazi regime, as victims of that regime—as some German conservatives represent them today. Still, as tricky as billing the account of the deaths of World War II may be, and allowing for discounts in all doubtful cases, Hitler's hellish bill is such that it grossly surpasses that of Stalin in the years of terror.

To wit, the moral accountability for the dead is not a simple mechanical counting of corpses. The bodies of Red Army soldiers cannot be lumped with the bodies of Russian children. Soldiers can fight, and children cannot; hence the two cannot be lumped together as victims. Yet there is something proper in the mechanical criterion of measuring degree of evil by the number of victims. And my claim is that if we add to the responsibility of the Nazi regime all the victims of World War II, not just those who were murdered in the camps, Stalin's regime, hideous as it was, comes out as the lesser evil not in degree but in kind.

The Nature of the Victims

As a first approximation, Stalin's regime murdered its own people, whereas Hitler's regime murdered other people. One could be a loyal Nazi and feel secure in Hitler's Germany. No one except Stalin could ever feel secure under Stalin's rule. In fact, owing to Stalin's downright paranoia, even Stalin did not feel secure, as the affair of the Jewish doctors' plot indicates.

Stalin's reign of terror was random. A quota of victims had to be filled, regardless of any wrongdoing. Innocent people were routinely rounded up, many of them party loyalists. Indeed, Stalin's terror was directed toward party members as much as, if not more than, toward outsiders. This created the curious perception (one infused with a great deal of reality) that many of the perpetrators in Stalin's system were also its victims. So it was not as simple as what Akhmatova described as the two Russias, one sending the other to the camps. Stalin executed even heads of the NKVD like Yezhov and Yagoda, who had been his relentless executioners in the worst of times in the thirties. They, too, beside Bukharin, Rykov, Kresinsky, and for that matter Trotsky, fell under the ambiguous category of perpetrators-victims.

There was nothing like this in Nazi Germany. Apart from the Rohm purge, Hitler did very little to harm party loyalists or any other kind of loyalists. The Gestapo terror was directed toward political rivals such as the communists, or toward minorities such as the Jews.

Hitler's rule was largely a prime-mover's rule, the rule of an unmoved mover. Aristotle's example of an unmoved mover is of a loved one unaware of being loved and who nonetheless causes others to act and to try hard to second-guess her wishes in order to fulfill them. What took place in Nazi Germany was not always an outcome of Hitler's explicit instructions. Nor was it a function of an impersonal political structure.

It was Hitler's role as the prime mover, who was sometimes an unmoved mover, that made the Nazi system work.⁹

The point, however, is that Hitler's rule over the Germans, except for a short period during his ascendancy to power, was not chiefly based on terror. The emphasis here, of course, is on the rule over the Germans, not over the nations he conquered during the war. In the conquered countries he reigned

by terror and nothing but terror. Stalin's internal rule, by contrast, was based on terror as a crucial element, either because this was the only way to make his cruel command economy work, because there was no other way to move an immovable bureaucracy, because of his "despotic Asiatic" tendencies, or because of all these factors together.

Stalin's terror was not just rule by fear. It also served as a source of legitimacy in the eyes of the party members and sympathizers. Many of them believed they were not the only ones terrified of him, but that the enemies of the revolution were too. They wanted the enemies of the revolution to be scared. The loyalists believed that his brutality was a justified means of defending the revolution. It was the old idea of Ivan the Terrible, that fear and trembling are the sources of legitimacy and not just substitutes for it.

The triumphant Stalin, especially after World War II, like Ivan the Terrible after the victory over the Tartars and the Teutonic Knights, ruled not just by fear and trembling but also by fear and admiration. But what does this account, if true, have to do with our moral comparison between the two regimes?

For one thing, it calls for a distinction between comparing Stalin and Hitler, on the one hand, and comparing the regimes of Stalin and of Hitler, on the other. We tend to conflate the two and to refer to the regimes by the synecdoche "Hitler" or "Stalin," much as we refer to the two individuals. But even if we maintain that the individuals Hitler and Stalin were equally evil, or that Stalin was even more wicked than Hitler, the regimes in terms of the people involved should be assessed differently. In one regime its own people were terrorized, and this is partly why they committed their evil deeds. In the other regime, they did it willingly. Hitler's people did what they did willingly, whereas many of Stalin's people were

coerced into evil by a stupefying fear. One should not buy Khrushchev's interpretation, delineated in his famous secret speech to the Twentieth Party Conference, which claimed that Stalin and Stalin alone was responsible for the terror, while the rest were all his victims. Or, as he expressed it, "But as I later told Mikoyan, 'When Stalin says dance, a wise man dances.'"¹⁰ Many, not Stalin alone, created the monstrous rule of terror, and Khrushchev himself had a great deal to do with it. And yet there is something right about his account. It is the ambiguity of the *victim-perpetrator* relationship that makes the case of Stalinism more morally ambiguous than the univocal case of Hitlerism.

The Moral Status of Fellow Travelers

The moral comparison between Stalinism and Hitlerism involves the moral comparison between the sympathizers of the two regimes. What excuses those who lived under a regime of terror does not excuse those sympathizers not subjected to Stalinist terror. The Soviet population supported Stalin's regime vociferously. So what makes Drieu La Rochelle, a Nazi sympathizer of his own will, moral anathema, and why do we have a soft spot for Louis Aragon, the Stalinist enthusiast? After all, it was Aragon who wrote the despicable poem "Prelude to the Cherry Season" (1931) with its recurrent mantra "Long live the GPU." There is no question that we would have treated him very differently had he written, "Long live the Gestapo." But in fact the GPU, better known by its later acronym of NKVD, was an instrument of oppression far more ubiquitous than the Gestapo. Until the war, there were about 8,000 Gestapo torturers, as compared to 350,000 in the GPU.

It is this kind of question about the moral equivalence of, say, Aragon and La Rochelle that gives rise to the feeling that the moral comparison between Hitlerism and Stalinism deals simply with settling scores with former communists and their fellow travelers. But exposing the hypocrisy of the pro-Soviet Left is not enough of a serious moral question to test our moral theories against. Those who raise the issue of the lesser evil between communism and Nazism may well have such a motive. Still, this does not mean that we should not be troubled by the question why there are former Stalinists among our best friends, but not former Hitlerists, and why we make allowances for them that we would never dare make for Hitlerists. "Speak for yourself," you may retort. But I don't think that I am speaking only for myself in raising this semiautobiographical question.

No question that in the 1930s some people sensed there was something wrong with Stalin's Russia, but believed that they were facing in an acute form the question of the lesser evil. The only force, they reasoned, both able to stop Nazism and committed to doing so was Communism. Given that the real moral choice was between Communism and Nazism, they opted for Communism on the lesser-evil argument.¹¹ What made it easier to pose the problem in such terms were agitprop agents with a real flair for propaganda, like Willi Munzenberg. Such skillful propagandists were clever enough to change the vocabulary of the choice by creating "popular fronts" that posed the question as a choice between Fascism and Anti-Fascism. Siding with Russia was simply the only efficient way of combating Fascism. After the war many of those who made such a choice of the lesser evil in the thirties were grateful for the heroism of the Red Army and for the Russian people's sacrifices in the war that brought Hitler

down. They remained loyal to Russia and its wartime leader as an act of gratitude. These sympathizers had to cope with the embarrassing episode of the pact between Hitler and Stalin, but the heroism of Stalingrad later on more than made up for it.

Of course, not all Stalin's sympathizers were of the lesser-evil type; most were communists who viewed his communism as a positive good rather than a lesser evil. And many of those who had embraced communism were morally motivated, whereas no one embraced Nazism for moral reasons. This is significant. Communism offered a moral vision; Nazism did not. And many were attracted to the moral vision of a nonexploitative classless society. But I would like to address a different kind of supporters, those clearheaded enough to see that there was something deeply disturbing about Stalinism, and yet convinced that Stalinism was the lesser evil. Were these people justified?

In asking this question I do not ask whether they were right in believing that the situation was one of a simple choice between Communism and Nazism. But rather, since that is what they believed, were they allowed to side morally with Stalin at the time? Well, they were entitled, as Churchill was, to believe in the lesser-evil argument. True, Churchill also believed that the choice was not either Communism or Fascism but a much better third alternative: *he himself*. In the appeasement atmosphere of the time it is hard to blame those who believed in the either-Fascism-or-Communism view of the world.

I claim therefore not that those popular front people can be forgiven for their factual assessment of the world, but rather that they were very much entitled to their moral assessment of the lesser evil, just as Churchill was right in preferring the devil to Hitler. I still believe, however, that they were all wrong at the time in their lesser-evil argument,

since, judging by conventional standards of decency and justice, Stalin's regime in the thirties was by no means the lesser evil of the two. And yet these people sensed something right and important, namely, that Hitler introduced an altogether new and different kind of evil.

Attack on Morality Itself

An important distinction between Communism and Nazism is that Nazism is an attack on the very idea of morality, whereas Communism, perverse as it was under Stalinism, does not attack morality as such. The idea is that the main premise of morality is shared humanity. Nazi racism, both in doctrine and in practice, was a conscious attack on the idea of shared humanity, and hence on the very possibility of morality itself. Stalinism was a terrible doctrine, not just in practice, but it did not amount to the very denial of shared humanity. Or so I shall argue.

Though I borrow from Kant the expression "radical evil," I do not borrow its content. In my use *radical evil* is any attack on morality itself. By attack I do not mean just a doctrinal nihilistic assault on the idea of morality but an assault through a combination of doctrine and practice. Nazism, in this sense, is radically evil.

Stuart Hampshire, too, regards Nazism as an attack on morality and not just as a gross violation of morality. But Hampshire emphasizes Nazism's attack on the idea of justice. Understanding justice as the constraints we humans impose on two human urges—toward domination and toward amassing a greater share of the rewards for ourselves—then Nazism, in Hampshire's view, is all about unrestricted domination.

I emphasize what I regard as the chief premise of morality, namely, the idea that all human beings should be subjected to moral treatment solely because they are human. Setting aside "soft" racism, in the sense of trivial racial prejudices, the hard racism of the Nazi variety—that which calls for eradicating "inferior" races such as the Jews and the Gypsies and for subjugating the Slavs—is a flagrant negation of the idea of shared humanity. Acting on such negation of shared humanity, as the Nazi regime clearly did, is promoting radical evil. It undermines morality itself.

A rotten compromise is rotten because it undermines morality. Hitler was not unique in undermining morality. But the distinction I am drawing here is between undermining morality in *deeds* and undermining morality in *deeds and in doctrine*—exactly what Hitlerism did.

Let us distinguish between *external* evil and *internal* evil. External evil is radical evil that amounts to a denial of the moral point of view in deed and doctrine. Internal evil comprises a gross undermining of morality in deed without denying moral points of view in doctrine. In terms of this distinction, the question is, should we exempt Stalinism from the charge of radical evil?

Was Stalinism Radically Evil?

Does Marxism undermine morality in doctrine? Did Stalin undermine morality not only in *deed* but also in *doctrine*? The first question is tricky. Marxism's is an ambivalent doctrine of morality. It is motivated by the moral idea of the evil of exploitation and dehumanization due to alienation.

Moreover, Marxism has an attitude to morality that I strongly support in this book: "a society is not the temple of

value-idols that figure on the front of its monuments or in its constitutional scrolls; the value of a society is the value it places upon man's relation to man."¹²

Yet it views morality as an ideology, as a set of values and ideals that emerge in particular historical circumstances and function to consolidate the economic and social order of that historical stage. Moreover, morality was perceived by orthodox Marxism as a sentimental ideology, masking class conflict with abstract ("bourgeois") talk about humanity—which meant that bourgeois class interests pretended to be the universal interests of humanity. Revolutionary Marxists boasted of their toughness and uncompromising commitment to the class war: any appeal beyond class to shared humanity was suspicious.

Stalin was molded as a hardened revolutionary Marxist, to the point that class for him played almost the role that race played for social Darwinists. For social Darwinists, war among races is a biological necessity obeying the laws of biology. For hardened Marxists, unyielding class war is a historical necessity obeying the laws of history. So no real difference emerges between the two views with regard to shared humanity. Moreover, Stalin and Stalinists treated class origin as destiny. All those brought up in a bourgeois family, in their view, retained indelible bourgeois tendencies throughout their lives; no matter how loyal they were to the cause, they remained suspect. Class origin could be invoked as an indictment at any time—as occurred during the purges of the 1930s. All these statements are very true and very real, especially relating to Stalin's personal attitude to morality.

Yet the sway of Marxism on Stalinism still retained in doctrine, though not in practice, Marx's moral aspiration. By Stalinism, I mean an extenuated form of Leninism and not a separate new ideology. Creating a classless society for all

humanity in which there would be no exploitation was more than the official line of the party for propaganda purposes. It was a deeply held doctrine, and even if shrouded in "dialectical" talk rather than in a moral imperative, its moral force was recognized by many and was a source of attraction for many, especially in the West.

Richard Overly, who commented astutely on the role of necessity, biological and historical, in the attitude of both toward morality, goes on quickly to mention their similarly hostile attitude toward Christianity, perhaps because they believed that morality is Christian morality.¹³ But then there are Christians and Christians, much as there are Marxists and Marxists; in both cases, though, they are species of a common genus. One such Christian deserves our attention. Stalin's attitude toward morality even in its Marxist form does not differ materially from that of Tomás de Torquemada, the great Spanish inquisitor of the fifteenth century, toward Christ's moral teaching. One may very well ask whether Torquemada was a true Christian, much as one may ask whether Stalin was a true Marxist. My answer to both questions is a qualified yes. Both retained, albeit perversely, the idea of shared humanity. Hitler, however, did not retain the idea of shared humanity—though he kept using the term—not even perversely.

The question about Torquemada is same as the question that Ivan Karamazov asks about the Grand Inquisitor.¹⁴ The Grand Inquisitor believes that by giving humanity a moral choice in the way Jesus understands it, he (Jesus) withholds redemption from most men and makes redemption the business of the few. By contrast, the Inquisitor believes that his actions aim at saving all men, and he does all he can to remove the burden of choice from humanity. Dostoevsky was torn by the issue of whether the Grand Inquisitor is an authentic Christian or whether he follows the Devil (as Ivan

Karamazov thought). Dostoevsky did not settle the question. But one thing is clear: Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor cares about humanity as a whole. The Grand Inquisitor differs from Christ in his assessment of human nature, but he cares about the salvation of humanity at large.

Marxist-Leninists in the Soviet Union under Stalin retained the moral vision of a nonexploitative classless society for humanity at large; this is a very different doctrine from Nazism, which rejected any form of recognized morality by essentially dividing humanity into immutable races.

The Withering Away of Morality

The Marxist-Leninist doctrine of class war destroying the state, seen as a bourgeois organ of repression, is well documented. But another doctrine related to the destruction of the state may be termed the withering away of morality. What is this (tacit) doctrine, and does it undermine morality?

In this Marxist view, both bourgeois economics and bourgeois morality are based on a common "naturalistic" assumption of scarcity: we humans face, in all societies and under all circumstances, competing demands on scarce resources. The well-known paradox of diamonds highlights this assumption. Why is the price of diamonds so much higher than the price of water, even though we need water to sustain our life and we can easily do without diamonds? The answer, according to Adam Smith, is scarcity. Compared to scarce diamonds, water is abundant, which is why water is cheaper than diamonds.

I have already mentioned that Aristotelian thinkers such as Maimonides thought that scarcity was a fact of the world of matter, but not of the world of the spirit. Hence the right

way to live is the contemplative life of the spirit. This is precisely the tendency that Marxian thinking tries to block. Contemplative life is not the only form of life worth living, not even the preferred one. Moreover, it is not the only way to escape scarcity. If paradise is the dream of humanity, a life without scarcity, the Marxists believe there is no need for such wishful thinking. Properly understood, scarcity is a result of historical conditions, not of natural conditions. Scarcity can be overcome in historical times. It can be overcome, on the one hand, by technological innovations that will increase immeasurably what the material world can offer us. On the other hand, it can be overcome by the creation of a classless society with no competing claims on the available resources, with a different set of desires that will fulfill human true needs rather than desires shaped by an irrational urge for domination. The effect will be a radical change in human patterns of consumption, such that scarcity will no longer have dominion over human beings.

With scarcity gone, not only is economics gone, but morality withers away. In a world without scarcity, there is no need for morality any more than there was any need for Adam and Eve in paradise to eat from the tree of knowledge to know good from evil. Abundance undermines the need for a distinction between good and evil.

The question is whether this vision of overcoming scarcity, and hence undercutting morality, falls under the heading of undermining morality. My answer is, not in the least. The mere fact that Communism aspires to overcome morality by creating conditions such that it will no longer be needed, does not undermine morality any more than the aspiration to create a situation of perfect health undermines medicine.

Stalinism is morally a huge experiment in Pascal's wager.¹⁵ A socialist world without any scarcity in the future has an in-

finite utility. The overwhelming expected utility of the future world justifies, on utilitarian grounds, any amount of suffering today. The infinite future bliss dwarfs the suffering of today on the ground of expected utility. This Pascalian wager of betting on future history is a bad argument, since if you pump infinite utility into future socialism or into kingdom come, anything goes. Every state of affairs has a tiny probability of bringing about the blissful future: multiply it by the infinite utility of the future and you get an infinite expected utility justifying that particular state of affairs. In short, the Stalinist use of Pascal's wager can justify fascism as much as it justifies communism. It can justify everything, and hence it justifies nothing.

But with all this moral sophistry about the blissful future, there are, of course, questions about the road, whether or not it leads to the Promised Land. Or, to switch to a more familiar metaphor, the question is whether, in addition to breaking eggs, Stalinism can produce an omelet. Put literally, were the means taken by Stalinism instrumentally adequate to bringing about the desired end?

If the end is a world without scarcity, then the answer should be a resounding no. But if the end was to create an industrial society that could stand up to enemies such as Nazi Germany, then the answer is yes. Awful as these means were, the outcome of World War II shows that they were indeed adequate for that goal. But this gambit of shifting the goal, at least temporarily, from socialism to industrialization is, morally speaking, a red herring. It was used by Stalinist apologetics to justify Stalin's choice of the right way to overcome Nazism—as if Communism was born to combat Nazism, and as if there never existed a pact between Stalin and Hitler, a pact that Stalin was determined to keep. It is a case of shooting first and drawing the bull's-eye later.

In the Name of Future Humanity

The practice of Stalinism was hellish but its ideals were moral. With Hitlerism, both the practice and the ideals were fiendish. So much the worse, some might say, for Stalinism. On this account, it is much worse to act immorally in the name of moral ideals, just as it is worse to be a hypocrite and act immorally than to act immorally without being hypocritical about it. The Nazis at least did not pretend to behave morally.

I disagree. The cliché that hypocrisy is the homage paid by vice to virtue has, I believe, a profound meaning. Hypocrisy, irritating as it is, at least recognizes morality; and Communism, even in its wretched Stalinist form, is not nihilism. Nazism, unlike Communism in general and Stalinism in particular, is a denial of shared humanity. This is my claim. But is it true?

In a chapter entitled "The Attack on Humanity" Jonathan Glover rightly points out that Nazi practices carried dehumanization to relentless extremes. My point is that not only the practice but also the doctrine denied a shared humanity. But then one asks whether it is true that the Nazi ideology, confused and confusing as it was, denied the idea of shared humanity. After all, Glover uses as a motto for one of his chapters these words from Hitler: "Those who see in National Socialism nothing more than a political movement, know scarcely anything of it. It is more even than a religion: it is the will to create mankind anew."¹⁶ One may cogently argue that this idea would not be alien to Stalin, nor to Mao. They all talked and acted in the name of a future humanity they were going to create; none of them was committed to a concrete shared humanity. So why does it matter whether you are excluded from future humanity for being a parasitic

bourgeois, as in Stalinism, or for being a parasitic Jew, as in Nazism? After all, both categories of human beings, bourgeois and Jews, were perceived in equally inhuman terms—as "parasites."

The idea of humanity's future and the idea of shaping "a new man" are fantasies of many ideologies. Moreover, the idea that one class of people anticipates man's future and humanity's future, be they "the workers," "the bureaucrats," or "the students," is also an idea shared by many radical ideologies. With it goes the idea that the humanity of today is, in biblical terms, a "desert generation" that will perish on the way to the Promised Land. Stalinism, I maintain, is an extreme case of this dangerous fantasy of callousness toward the concrete people of today in the name of abstract future humanity.

But Hitlerism is something very different. It is the dismembering of humanity into races. It thereby excludes, as a matter of doctrine, groups of people from deserving moral consideration of any sort. If the Slavs are destined in Hitler's "future humanity" to be slaves, the ontological and moral status of the Slavs is no better than that of domestic animals.

When it comes to Nazism, there is no room for morality. At most we can find in Nazism a perverse hygiene, run by categories of filth. Filth is regarded as a degenerative disease, and thereby as the degeneration of the master race. Future humanity in Hitler's fantasy is not humanity: the master race replaces the idea of humanity. This is radical evil if anything is. So in my view, Churchill was right in preferring Stalin to Hitler, or in his language, the Devil to Herr Hitler, not because the former was a lesser evil in degree but because he was a lesser evil in kind.