Dirty Hands or Political Virtue?

Walzer's and MacIntyre's Answers to Machiavelli's Challenge

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Abstract
Within the field of Administrative Ethics the tension between public values often is addressed by referring to the work of Niccolo Machiavelli. The Florentine master dramatically brought to light inevitable tensions between values like effectiveness and integrity or between public trust and individual virtue. In fact, Machiavelli created a major problem for any Ethics in the field of politics and administration: his lessons for the effective ruler make ethics instrumental, or at least secondary, to political considerations. Michael Walzer answered this challenge in his analysis of dirty hands cases. In this paper ambiguities and contradictions in Walzer's position will be pointed out. It will be shown, furthermore, that a virtue ethical approach, like that of Alasdair MacIntyre, can explain those problems, especially when its consequences for reason giving and accountability are further developed. Proceeding in this way this paper argues that of the prominent contemporary approaches to ethics, a properly developed virtue ethics is most promising to deal with the Machiavellian challenge. This conclusion implies an agenda for further research, but it also has consequences for the curricula of ethics courses and for the way practitioners deal with hard questions.

1. Introduction

The first task of any Administrative or Political Ethics must be to answer Machiavelli. The implication of the Florentine master's famous lesson "(A) prince must learn how not to be virtuous, to make use of this or not according to need (…) and to know how to escape the evil reputation" seems to be inevitable: ethics is secondary to politics (Machiavelli 1987/1514: I ix; 1981/1513: ch xv, see also xviii). Considerations of generosity, compassion, honesty and the like can always be trumped by political expedience. Being virtuous (or appearing to be) is instrumental to political effectiveness. Any self conscious Political Ethics that does not want to be the politician's servant, thus, has to face the challenge that Machiavelli poses. It has to

answer the question how a firm ground for ethics in the field of politics can be regained. Without a proper answer to this challenge courses in Administrative ethics in university programs are in fact superfluous, and the concerns for ethical deliberation in administrative practice become meaningless.

The reactions that have been given to Machiavelli's lesson can be distinguished into three categories. First of all, there are those that attempt to defuse Machiavelli's bomb by arguing that he is simply mistaken or, stronger even, that he is intentionally deceiving his readers. A well known comment in this line is that of Leo Strauss. He tries to show that Machiavelli is "a teacher of evil" that must be unmasked (1958). To do so, however, Strauss employs a cryptographic exegesis of Machiavelli's text that few will find convincing (Pocock 1975).
A second category of reactions grants that realizing political aims sometimes might demand deceit or other vices. Yet, it has to be acknowledged that Machiavelli had very specific political aims in mind. The prince's rule ultimately has to lead to the establishment and stable functioning of republics. Machiavelli should be understood as a "philosopher of liberty" (Pocock 1975a; Skinner 1990; Viroli 1998, 2008). Authors following this line can build on Machiavelli's writings in a more convincing way. Yet, in pointing out the good character of political aims, the Machiavellian problem for Political Ethics is not solved. Virtues like honesty and benevolence still are sacrificed for political purposes. The problem, in fact, becomes even more complicated as one type of ethical considerations (the political ones) now comes to overrule the other type (ordinary ethical standards).
A third reaction follows the second in not simply discarding political aims as the arbitrary desires or interests of the ruler. It differs from it, however, in taking the tensions between two types of ethical demands seriously. Influential advocates of this line of thought are Max Weber in *Politics as a Vocation* (1961/1919) and Michael Walzer (1973) in his well-known article on dirty hands.

In recent years Walzer's article has often been cited in discussions on the justifiability of torture, for its classical formulation of the so-called ticking bomb case. The answer Walzer provides to the Machiavellian problem is that in politics, typically, one can be confronted by moral dilemmas. In such cases the holder of office has to do wrong to do right. He realizes the good, but is guilty of doing evil all the same. He saves lives by disarming explosives, but has to order torture to do so. Walzer argues that one should recognize the reality of this type of dilemma, and that societies need to find ways to share in the unavoidable guilt that political action entails. Politicians that have dirtied their hands for us should not be left as lone tragic hero's, but should be comforted in something like a Catholic confession.
Walzer's solution to Machiavelli's problem is a peculiar one that raises several questions. He seems to succeed in keeping political action within the domain of the ethical, but that comes at a price. He does not seem to be able to give any clue to the politician that asks the basic ethical question "what should I do"? The remedy offered in his conclusion, furthermore, seems to lead to the religious or psychological domain and away from that of ethics.
This paper first argues that Walzer's attempt to solve Machiavelli's problem on crucial points is too vague and contradictory. Next, it will be shown that a virtue ethics, as it has been presented by Alasdair MacIntyre (1985), can answer issues that Walzer's argument raises. A full answer entails an elaboration of the implications of virtue ethics for reason giving and accountability. Machiavelli was wrong to turn away from the received virtue ethical tradition. By following this course, this analysis answers the question: "Can prominent contemporary approaches to Political Ethics answer the Machiavellian challenge?"

2. Walzer's approach to *Dirty Hands* and its problems

Recently military interventions and measures taken to deal with terrorist attacks refueled interest in the issue of justified torture. In many articles and books on torture Walzer's approach to the issue of torture, in his article "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands (Walzer 1973), was cited to find support. For present purposes it is, however, not his specific view on torture that is of interest, but his general argument on the possibility of *ethical* political action. In what sense does he offer an answer to Machiavelli's challenges, and is that answer sufficient and convincing?

Walzer starts by pointing out a phenomenon the reader, he believes, will readily recognize. In everyday life, and even more so in politics, individuals are sometimes confronted with dilemmas. These involve "the choice between upholding an important moral principle and avoiding some looming disaster" (160). Whatever one does in such cases, afterwards one is no longer innocent. As a politician one has either failed to do the right thing, measuring up to the duties of one's office, or dirtied one's hands by breaking some moral rule (161).
To illustrate the political reality of dirty hands cases Walzer presents two examples. The first is about a candidate running for office who has to make a deal with a dishonest ward boss, involving granting construction contracts, in order to win the election. The second one is about an official who faces the decision to authorize the torture of a captured rebel in order to locate bombs hidden in apartment buildings. In both cases one hopes, Walzer maintains, that the person involved has scruples but breaks the moral rule in order to do good, but will feel guilty about it.

> 'His willingness to acknowledge and bear (and perhaps to repent and do penance for) his guilt is evidence, and it is the only evidence he can offer us, both that he is not too good for politics and that he is good enough. Here is the moral politician: it his by his dirty hands that we know him. If he were a moral man and nothing else, his hands would not be dirty: if he were a politician and nothing else, he would pretend that they were clean' (167/8).

Utilitarians, Walzer argues, will be inclined to dismiss the idea of any real dilemma: in cases like the ones in the examples, it is simply right to realize the good outcome. The good man weighs the alternatives, calculates the consequences and takes the proper decision. What is wrong in such an utilitarian approach, Walzer points out, is that it does not take into account that there are acts that are known to be bad quite apart from immediate circumstances. They are understood to be simply wrong. These absolute prohibitions of wrongful actions, furthermore, are not merely guidelines or summaries of previous calculations. Such an understanding of these prohibitions does not "capture the reality of our moral life": when rules are overridden we know we have done something wrong (170, 171).
According to Walzer, Machiavelli acknowledged the reality of the dilemma. In *The Prince* honesty or benevolence are presented as moral standards and are not ridiculed or simply dismissed. Machiavelli acknowledged them, yet at the same time wanted to persuade princes to dishonor those standards for political results. What Machiavelli did not say, however, is what the penalties are for not being good. "A Machiavellian hero", according to Walzer, "has no inwardness" (176). A completely different picture is drawn by Max Weber (1961/1919). In *Politics as a Vocation* the good man with dirty hands is presented as a tragic hero. He lies, intrudes and does other things that are even worse – and he suffers. Weber's hero is a politician as one would like him to be, according to Walzer, because he has an inner life. Yet Weber's hero "is alone in a world that seems to belong to Satan, and his vocation is entirely his own choice" (176).

It would be better, Walzer argues, if the hero's suffering could be "socially expressed", for himself and for the citizens on whose behalf he acts. For citizens would not want a politician with dirty hands "to lose his soul". He should therefore have some hope of personal salvation - just like a sinner does in the teachings of the Catholic Church. His act should be regarded as a determinate crime, and he must pay therefore a determinate penalty (177/8). In a sense dirty hands acts resemble acts of civil disobedience; there also rules are broken to do good. In disobedience cases, however, the rules are legal ones. Dirty hands, however, is about breaking moral rules. And in this moral field, Walzer concludes, there seems to be no way to establish or enforce punishment. "Short of the priest and the confessional, there are no authorities to whom we might entrust the task" (178).

Walzer, in short, tries to save political ethics from the Machiavellian threat by emphasizing, first of all, the moral force of rules prohibiting certain acts. Acting bad, by breaking those rules, in order to do good, still is bad. These ethical considerations are not secondary and merely instrumental. Secondly, in cases in which these rules are broken the ethical character of the act finds expression within the conscience of the politician who dirties his hands to do good, yet still feels guilt.

This solution contains some serious weaknesses. A first set of problems concerns the contours of the notion of dirty hands: in what type of cases, exactly, might it be good to do bad? Walzer sometimes seems to mean that the issue of dirty hands is not restricted to specific issues or a specific domain. He speaks about dilemmas simply ("a situation where one must choose between two courses of action both of which would be wrong for him to take", 160); he dismisses the suggestion that everyday moral and political discourse constitute different levels of argument (162, 174); and he gives examples from very different contexts (like war, terrorist threat, lying in office or cheating in elections).
In other instances, however, Walzer's argument strongly suggests that he wants to limit the "tolerable wrongdoing" of dirty hands to a more specific domain or a certain type of cases. He focuses, for example, in the main part of the text not on dilemma's simply, but on the acts of politicians. He notes not only that they turn to dirtying their hands more often, but suggests also that there is a categorical difference with ordinary life dilemmas (162/3). Furthermore, not all motives for breaking rules seem to be valid: examples of emergencies dominate the text, suggesting that dirty hands have no place in more ordinary cases. The ambiguity or unclarity in Walzer's concept is also apparent in the type of rules that are broken in dirty hands cases. In the conclusion Walzer explicitly denotes them as moral rules by distinguishing them from the legal rules that are broken in civil disobedience. Yet, elsewhere in the text, it seem to be law (torture example) or political mores (election example) that are at stake. These ambiguities make it unclear when exactly any particular case must be treated as a dirty hands case.

A second problem in Walzer's argument becomes apparent: "what should one do in the case of a dilemma?" At first sight it might seem that Walzer's position entails that this question cannot be answered. By using the term dilemma and by framing oppositions of considerations in the way he does, Walzer suggests that there is no right solution in dirty hands cases. Yet, on closer examination there seems to be more to it. He claims, for instance, that deliberating on a dirty hands issue is "a painful process which forces a man to weigh the wrong he is willing to do in order to do the right" (174). The formulation implies that there can be given good reasons to take one horn of the dilemma; deliberation (and not simply tossing a coin) is possible.

In other places, Walzer is even more explicit on the type of action he thinks is most proper. He claims that "(i)t is easy to get one's hands dirty in politics *and it is often right to do so*" (174, emphasis added).[1] The particular formulation that Walzer chooses implies that "dirty hands" actually refers to taking one specific side in the dilemma: breaking rules in order to get results. And acting in this way is the mark of a truly moral politician: "it is by his dirty hands that we know him" (168).[2] And it is probably for this reason - doing the good thing by daring to break the rules - that Walzer follows Weber in calling such a public official a hero.

It is of course possible to read too much into these phrases. They might be slips of the pen, going beyond the actual intention of Walzer. And indeed, Walzer does not specify what he means by deliberation nor does he give any reason why taking one horn of the dilemma is better than taking the other. Yet, if Walzer indeed intends to leave the dirty hands dilemmas unresolved (and unsolvable) can his answer really be as a solution to the Machiavellian problem? His most dramatic change to Machiavelli's picture of the good ruler is the shift toward the "inner life" of person that dirtied his hands. One might say that he, in fact, changes the question to be answered: he switches from answering the question "what should he do?" to the question "what should he feel?" or even "how can his soul be saved?" If the first question is typical for ethics, he changes the perspective from an ethical one to a merely religious or a psychological one.[3]

This analysis could stop at this point and file Walzer's solution in the archives of failed attempts to solve the Machiavellian problem. By taking that course of action, however, an opportunity would be missed to follow Walzer's suggestions in a more elaborate way. This implies turning to an ethics that can offer an understanding of deliberation in dealing with hard cases and that does link "choosing what to do" with a person's inner quality. A promising candidate for a more convincing solution to Machiavelli's challenge seems to be a virtue ethics approach. By focusing on individual virtues such an approach centers on inner qualities. This approach is all the more interesting as Machiavelli himself uses some elements of the virtue tradition.
In recent years the Aristotelian or virtue ethics tradition (re-)appeared in Public Administration. Most publications in this field focus on specific aspects of the tradition, for example practical reasoning (Beiner 1983) the importance of contextuality (Williams 2005, 1985; Larmore 1987), or the idea of virtues in practices (Cooper 1987; Crick 1962; Cooper 1998). Few explicitly deal with the Machiavellian problem or dilemmas for that matter. Many of de recent advocates of virtue ethics, however draw on the seminal work of Alasdair MacIntyre. MacIntyre's work on virtue ethics is broad ranging also in theoretical terms. That makes it proper starting point for this analysis. Does virtue ethics, as presented by Alasdair MacIntyre (1985; 2006; 1999), solve the problems in Walzer's answer to Machiavelli's challenge?

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[1] On Walzer's position in the dilemma that he himself sketches, see also Nielsen (2000).
[2] Note that Walzer here comes close to Machiavelli's lesson, yet there is also a difference. Machiavelli urges princes not to show the vicious side of their acts. Walzer suggests here, and in his remarks on confession and punishment, that the politician who made his hands dirty should come forward and be open about it. In other words, Machiavelli urges the ruler to dirty his hands twice (break the rules, and lie about it), for Walzer dirty hands acts contain only a single wrongdoing.
[3] For reasons of space this paper will not go into the relation between acting ethical on the one hand and feelings of guilt or not realizing happiness on the other. For these issues see De Wijze (2007) and Stocker (1990: esp ch 3).

3. MacIntyre's Virtue Ethics Answer to Dirty Hands

Nowhere in his publications does MacIntyre explicitly address the Machiavellian problem, or the dirty hands issue, for that matter. He has, however, a clear position on moral dilemmas. MacIntyre affirms that individuals might find themselves entangled in contradiction and thus apparently face a irresolvable dilemma. Yet, he follows Aquinas who denied that moral dilemmas are "among the ultimate facts of the moral life" (MacIntyre 2006: 99). The person with a well-developed inner life might encounter hard cases, but will be able to take the proper course of action. To understand how MacIntyre reaches this conclusion it is necessary to turn to the virtue ethical argument that MacIntyre elaborates, an argument that situates itself in the tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas.

The basic concepts in virtue ethics are not rules or unalienable rights or general principles (like the utilitarian "the greatest good for the greatest number") but virtues. Virtues refer to the attitudes and qualities of individuals that enable them to take the right course of action in specific situations.
People's dealings in all kinds of activities might bring them money or fame or power, items that MacIntyre calls "external goods". Such "goods" might be gained through participation in any kind of activity. Yet, there are also "internal goods". These goods can only be realized through the proper kind of participation in specific sets of activities or practices. Typical examples of such practices are healthcare, education, science, art, and politics. In such activities people are involved together and these activities are valued for the specific aim they realize (health, knowledge), but also for the good that participating in them itself entails (MacIntyre 1985: ch 14).
Virtues allow the individual to participate in and contribute to a practice in such a way that the internal good can be realized. Being virtuous means having developed through experience as a "second nature" the inclinations and qualities to make the proper judgment in each case, like a virtuoso or a skilled craftsman. What exactly the virtues are, depends on the particular practice in which they have their function (MacIntyre 1985: 154). Yet all these different virtues have their similarities. First of all, they can always be further refined and have no ultimum or maximum. People participating in a practice can recognize those members that are more virtuous - like one can recognize those that are more skilled in some profession - and can further develop their qualities by following the proper examples. All virtues, secondly, can be understood as a mean between falling short and overdoing it. The courageous soldier, for instance, is neither a coward who leaves his post to soon, nor a reckless person who takes too large a risk.

The political practice, in MacIntyre's perspective, is not about competing interests and the struggle for power (although that also has its due), but it essentially is the context in which the participants can realize the common good. This practice fulfils an indispensable function for realizing human excellence and well being. It is the setting in which people learn the general or cardinal virtues - the virtues that are of importance in all types of practices: the virtues of justice, courage, reasonableness and truthfulness (MacIntyre 1985: 156; 1999: 132; 1994: 303). It fulfills this function, furthermore, because a political practice encompasses all other practices. It is in politics that the preconditions for other practices are safeguarded and priorities between values are established. "(P)olitical excellence and above all the excellence of the legislator consist in being good at ordering goods both generally and in particular types of situation"(MacIntyre 1988: 107). Political excellence, thus, is about taking the right decision, and acting upon it, if multiple goods or values are at stake.

MacIntyres' virtue ethics are good so far: a good politician should be able to order goods and aims. But what about employing the instruments needed to actually realizing them? Does it not take more to be effective? Political effectiveness, MacIntyre maintains, should be considered in relation to, or as an aspect of, virtuousness. Aristotle discussed the realities of political life in the *Politics*, and that book should be read, MacIntyre emphasizes, in combination with the *Ethics*. Both presentations were meant, as Aristotle himself indicated, to educate the members of the polis (MacIntyre 1988: 102, 110; Aristotle 1982: 1095a2-8). Especially in the *Politics*, Aristotle gives examples of the types of things rulers have to do to get results. To keep soldiers on guard, for instance, it might be appropriate to exaggerate the actual enemy threat on a particular moment (Aristotle 1990; Stocker 1990: ch 3; Johnson 1996). In judging such acts of expedience, MacIntyre points out, it is again of importance to take the moral quality of the person into account. "What someone takes to be his advantage depends upon what he is aiming at, and the aims of the good man are very different from those of either the vicious or the undisciplined" (MacIntyre 1988: 108; Aristotle 1982: 1144a 27/8). The ruler ought to have excellence of character in perfection (Aristotle 1990: 1260 a17). That also includes the quality to take into account the matters of effectiveness. In sum, the excellent ruler does not encounter real and unsolvable dilemmas; his skill and virtue make him take the right decision.

What, then, about the absolute prohibitions that Walzer invoked against the utilitarian consequentionalist type of moral argument? MacIntyre acknowledges the existence and moral relevance of rules and principles that transcend a particular context and even specific practices. Such rules, he argues, correspond to virtuous behavior that is appropriate in every practice. The prohibition to lie expresses, for instance, the virtue of truthfulness (MacIntyre 1985: 150/2, 200, 223; 1999: 109/110). The reality of these absolute moral qualifications, however, does not lead MacIntyre to conclude that politics is the field of unsolvable dilemmas. For one, MacIntyre recognizes that these general or cardinal virtues themselves can conflict. Courage for instance might sustain injustice (MacIntyre 1985: 200). In such cases the virtuous person again has to deliberate on the appropriate course of action in a particular context.

Secondly, the absolute rules have to be understood in relation to the practices from which they arise. In discussing the rule of truth-telling MacIntyre shows how truthfulness is a necessary precondition in a community in which individuals can develop into reasonable and virtuous actors. Yet, if truth-telling would undermine this practice - and that might be the cases when it faces threats of enemies of this community or its practice - it would no longer be a function of this practice. When the practice itself is endangered by it, the commandment to always speak the full truth might not be valid anymore (MacIntyre 2006: ch 6, 7). It would therefore be better the formulate the rule of truthfulness in a slightly different way: "Uphold truthfulness in all your actions by being unqualifiedly truthful in all those relationships and by lying to aggressors only in order to protect those truthful relationships against aggressors, and even then only when lying is the least harm that can afford an effective defense against aggression" (MacIntyre 2006: 139). In choosing this formulation, MacIntyre implies that certain considerations have to play a role in deliberation on taking extreme measures. Being concerned about doing least harm implies considering all other options and considering all the consequences of each.[4]

MacIntyre's solution to the Machiavellian problem thus comes down to a position that denies the possibility of real unsolvable dilemmas. MacIntyre asserts that empirical cases cannot

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[4] MacIntyre here also shows that the Thomist idea of natural law (and thus of rules in ethics) is not contradictory to his ethical program (MacIntyre 2006: 139).

definitely prove - or falsify – the existence of real unsolvable dilemmas. Each specific example of a real life unresolved dilemma for real-dilemma advocates is a proof of their point. Their opponents, however, can maintain that the proper solution in this case simply has not yet been elaborated (2006: ch 5).[5] MacIntyre, moreover, does not deny the possibility of tragic choices individuals have to make in the course of their life. In fact, he criticizes Aristotle for not taking tragic choices seriously. Aristotle claimed in his *Poetics* that heros in tragedies lack practical reason. MacIntyre maintains that Aristotle misread Sophocles and missed an important aspect of human life: people do encounter conflicting goods. They can engage in many different practices in the course of life, but sometimes these can come into conflict and make a choice unavoidable. Such cases are famously exemplified by the lives of T.E. Lawrence or Gauguin; the first endlessly oscillating between two worlds without choosing, and the second making a rigorous choice by fleeing to Polynesia. Also in dramatic cases, MacIntyre maintains, people can do better or worse in making choices. The better choices are those that fit best in a human life as a whole, a human life as an historical narrative. As Hall puts it in her discussion of MacIntyre's position: "It is the task of the individual to work to achieve a coherent story, to be able to account for one's actions and projects with reference to the narrative one is living out" (2004: 2/3). Practices, but also human lives as a whole, are understood as projects. It is in the form of narratives that such projects can be intelligible. This conception of unity of a whole life as a narrative is closely linked to a virtue MacIntyre especially valorizes: constancy, that is "the virtue of having an adequate sense of the traditions to which one belongs or which confront one" (1985: 223, see also 163/4, 179, 203, 212).

In sum, MacIntyres offers the following solutions to the issues Walzer's position raised:
- In a virtue ethics account of practical rationality there can be good reasons for making one's hands dirty (or not) in specific cases. These cases might be hard, but do not result in unsolvable dilemmas.
- When deliberating on dirty hands cases one must take into account all options and all the consequences of (not) taking extreme measures. That involves considering not only whether it really is the best solution to this acute threat, but also whether it contributes to or is likely to undermine this common political project in the long run. In Walzer's rendering of the ticking bomb case only the first type of consequentionalist considerations seems to be taken into account.
- Situations of extreme emergency, of serious aggression, indeed can be understood as a special case: the actual domain of dirty hands. It is in these circumstances that the normal considerations that give ground to "absolute" moral rules, might no longer prevail. This implies that Walzer's much-cited ticking bomb example might count as a dirty hands case; the case, that many commentators neglect of the bribing a ward boss to win the election, does not.
- The fact that dirty hand cases typically involve the breach of rules and virtues that are relevant for all practices, that is the rules and virtues that are central in the political practice, explains that the issue especially is associated with politics.
- Dirty hands cases concern extreme cases and not simply all dilemmas. This explains a special concern in such cases, not for prioritizing specific goods or values, but for breaking a specific rule in order to realize a particular good.

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[5] This problem explains why edited volumes can contain on the one hand essays that recognize dirty hands dilemmas and refutations thereof on the other hand. (See for instance Rynard 2000). There is, to be sure, an abundance of literature on ethical dilemmas. It lies beyond the scope of this paper to give an overview of approaches.

There remains one point, however, in Walzer's analysis of dirty hands, not yet touched on in this presentation of MacIntyre's position: turning to others for confession or punishment when one has made one's hands dirty. Walzer pointed out that one trusts administrators and politicians because they are seen struggling with difficult cases and one appreciates their courage to conscientiously deal with them. Walzer seems to be pointing here to an important and necessary element of a political ethics: showing to citizens how one deals with tough cases.

4. Virtue ethics and reason giving

In presentations of virtue ethics the focus is always on the character and actions of individuals. Giving account of one's actions to others hardly ever gets any attention. Also in MacIntyre's wide-ranging work, no specific book or article on accountability or such theme can be found. Yet, scattered throughout his work concerns for reason giving and accountability can be found. On closer inspection, furthermore, the issue of giving account proves to be not merely accidental to his virtue ethics approach. It is of central relevance in virtue ethics on three levels: it is instrumental to safeguarding the realization of internal goods, it is an aspect of individual development, and it is connected to virtue ethics ontology.

First of all, giving account fulfills a crucial function in guarding the integrity of practices, including political practice. In several places MacIntyre emphasizes that all established practices (family, school, hospitals, local communities) in which people can realize the good and develop their virtues, also involve established hierarchies of power. These hierarchies and their uses of power can be for the good, but they can also be "instruments of domination and deprivation" and as such will often frustrate movement towards goods (MacIntyre 1999: 102/3; see also MacIntyre 1985: 104). Social institutions, thus, have a double character. They can be used badly, that is used for realizing the aims of the powerful only, but also for the common good. The individual's virtues are one way to block abuses of power - and herein also lies a reason for developing them (MacIntyre 1985: 194). Individual virtues need to be complemented, however, by institutional arrangements. The one specific field that MacIntyre goes into explicitly is that of deliberation. In a society in which the furthering of independent reasoning is part of the common project, one has to be able and prepared "to evaluate the reasons for actions advanced to one by others, so that one makes oneself accountable for one's endorsements of the practical conclusions of others as well as for one's own conclusions" (1999: 105). One of the essential preconditions to establish and maintain the right kind of relation between people are institutionalized forms of deliberation, MacIntyre maintains (1999: 105, 129).

A second level is that of mutual learning and development. Central in the virtue ethical approach, MacIntyre explains, is the development of individual potentialities. Individual learning and development is a project that will never be fully completed. Virtue is not a fixed goal and new cases will always demand their own typical answers. When the more skilled and virtuous present the reasons for actions others can learn and improve their own judgment. (MacIntyre 1985: 190). Truthfulness in communication in practices is a basic virtue, precisely because it is a precondition for learning (MacIntyre 1985: 191). As practical rationality in virtue ethics is not a matter of applying rules or principles, reason giving and dialogue have a further function. It is a way to test whether one has adequately taken notice of relevant aspects. Being well informed is a necessary precondition for proper deliberation (MacIntyre 1999: 91, 97, 129). Dialogue with others and exchanging reasons, finally, allows to further

development of the traditions in which specific practices stand. Dialogue with others, even others that have mastered other traditions, can lead to new insights and perspectives that inspire for the further development of traditions (MacIntyre 1988: 349; 1985: 194).

The third level is the ontological one. At the basis of Aristotle's virtue ethics lies a specific ontology and a specific understanding of human nature. Human beings are understood to be naturally oriented towards the good, just like all entities in the cosmos are oriented towards their specific *telos*. Explanations of natural phenomena in terms of natural ends are no longer accepted; causal explanations have rightly taken their place. In human affairs, however, a teleological approach still is appropriate and possible, according to MacIntyre. His alternative builds on the concept of the self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative. Human behavior cannot be characterized and understood independent of intentions, and these intentions are only intelligible in social settings with a history. Intelligibility or meaningfulness of actions depends on the narratives in which they have a place. The alternative of the flawed natural teleology of Aristotle, therefore, is a *narrative* teleology. Man, according to MacIntyre, essentially is "a story-telling animal" (1985: 216). If one is asked or wants to explain the meaning or meaningfulness of one's actions, one has to tell a story. And it is narrative that can give human live its unity, ordering all the different limited goods. Peoples sometimes encounter - as mentioned earlier - a Sophoclean conflicts of goods. In such occasions one has to find the proper narrative for live. In MacIntyre's phrase: "The unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest" (1985: 216, 219 see also 58, 196/7, 205)".[6] He emphasizes that giving account, giving reasons for actions, basically is what a narrative is. And being held accountable and ask others for an account is correlative to the narrative basis of leading a meaningful life together with others (1985: 217/18). Accountability, therefore, in MacIntyre's virtue ethics is not only an instrument to guard of abuse of power or part of human learning. Giving account, due to its narrative form, is ontologically connected to virtue ethics.[7]

Returning now to Walzer's position and his attention for confession and punishment, it is clear that with a virtue ethics focus shifted from almost religious perspective to an ethical one of reason giving and accountability. For Walzer, giving account is merely a cure for the soul of the tormented ruler who cannot do right. For MacIntyre that might be an element - sharing the burden and being reassured in the process of explaining one's choices - but there is much more to it. Deliberating with and being accountable to one's fellow citizens - that is arguing whether one has made the proper decision and taken the right action - also implies checks on the use of power, and the possibility of mutual learning and exemplary action.[8] MacIntyre's understanding of political community as a practice, furthermore, makes it far less outlandish than Walzer suggested to understand all kinds of existing (political) forums as proper places to account for one's ethical choices in politics.

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[6] A full discussion of the criticism of this narrative teleology and replies to such comments lies beyond the scope of this paper. See on this topic for instance Kerr (1995), Kearney (2002: 79-83), Johnson (1996), and Hall (2004).

[7] In his discussion of MacIntyre's use of the narrative Johnson summarizes: "Accountability is an essential feature of all but the most straightforward narratives and is suggestive of the idea that narrative is in its essence a democratic mode" (1996: 57).

[8] Note that this comes very close to the argument Walzer himself develops for the case of civil disobedience (1970). Also in other works Walzer develops arguments that deviate from his account in the article on dirty hands that is discussed here (1973) The arguments in those works often come much closer to virtue ethics in, for instance, contextuality (1983; Walzer 1992) or deliberation (1987)

5. Conclusion

Machiavelli created a major problem for ethics in the field of politics and government: his lessons for the effective ruler make ethics instrumental, or at least secondary, to political considerations. Walzer answers the Machiavellian challenge in his analysis of dirty hands cases. Political considerations are not simply prioritized to ethical ones; they are placed in opposition, creating a dilemma. He seems to rescue ethics, yet that comes at the price of several ambiguities. Walzer claims that taking one particular horn of the dilemma is sometimes the best thing to do, but he cannot give any reason why that is the case. And because it remains ambiguous which situations are to be understood as dirty hands cases and which not, it is unclear when exactly it is good to take that horn of the dilemma. Eventually, Walzer deals with the dilemma by urging bona fide rulers who did good by doing wrong to share their feelings of guilt with others. His solution, thereby, seems to imply stepping from the ethical domain into that of religion or psychology.

MacIntyre also takes a view to ethics in which individual deliberation and personal quality are of central importance. He dismisses, however, the idea of fundamental and unsolvable dilemmas between political aims and instruments. He can explain, among other things, why especially in dealing with cases of extreme emergency there might be the need to break basic moral rules. A MacIntyrian virtue ethics can answer the shortcomings of Walzer's position. For such an answer to be complete, however, aspects of reason giving and accountability in virtue ethics need to be elaborated.

In conclusion we can formulate the outline of a Political Ethics that can stand the challenge of Machiavelli.
- It is a virtue ethics in which there always must, and can be, given a right answer in any specific context including in hard cases. Good decisions demand deliberation in which all values and consequences of actions for this particular case in this particular context are taken into consideration. Deliberation, herein, is not about employing rules or principles, but a form of practical rationality that can be developed in experience and training.
- Sometimes actions that normally are considered to be prohibited, might be inevitable. These are cases in which the integrity of the political practice and the continuity of this political community is at stake. In such cases of extreme emergency however, harsh measures can only been taken after due consideration of the further harm they might do.
- Rulers should be open about their actions and give reason for their decisions, including hard ones (or dirty hands cases). Accountability is necessary for at least two reasons. First, as all social practices also involve hierarchies and power that entail specific temptations it is necessary to develop guarantees against abuses. Secondly, a society in which the common good encompasses moral development and learning to be independent reasoners, giving reason for one's actions is indispensable.

Machiavelli's writings on politics also contain virtue ethical elements. He often formulates, for instance, the bad things that a prince must learn as deviations from virtues (and not merely as rules that the prince must break as Walzer has it): benevolence, compassion (Machiavelli 1981/1513: ch xv and following). Also for Machiavelli the good is closely linked to the quality and virtuosity of the individual. The ruler must be courageous (*Virtu*) - not in the least to deal with *Fortuna*, the "bitch Goddess of unpredictability". The excellent ruler, furthermore, is able to do the right thing in the specific setting. For Machiavelli, as for Aristotle and MacIntyre, the good ruler should always act with a firm eye on his goals.

Notwithstanding these elements, however, Machiavelli stepped out of the classical virtue ethical tradition. His virtues do not have the character of a mean between two vices, as is the case in Aristotle. Machiavelli often simply uses a dichotomy to distinguish virtues from complementing vices. Sometimes he even takes the enactment of a vice to be a virtue (Strauss 1958: 47, 240; Mansfield 1996: ch 1).

That Machiavelli has a completely different understanding of the virtues and of their role is most evident in his understanding of the relation between virtue and the community. The virtues are no longer defined and justified in relation to common practices and a common good. They are understood to have value and be understandable independently. The common good in many instances, especially in *Il Principe*, seems to be reduced to the ambitions of the prince, against the background of his overall aim to continue his rule over this state. In other places, mostly in *Discorsi*, Machiavelli gives reason to believe that he aims at a republican constitution in which the interests of all are taken into account (Pocock 1975a; Skinner 1990; Viroli 1998). Yet, it does not seem to be the case that this goes as far as the ideal of developing the good, and therefore virtues, in all (Strauss 1958: 254). Whatever interpretation one prefers, however, Machiavelli does not present any link between the individuals and their virtues and the common good (however understood).[9]

Two aspects in his argument lead to the Machiavellian challenge, and it is on these two aspects that Machiavelli differs fundamentally from MacIntyre's virtue ethical approach. First, moral rules (or virtues) are presented as absolute, as valid before any specific situation and practice. Secondly, reason giving and accountability as a central aspect of the political practice is absent. Remarkably, Walzer agrees with Machiavelli on these points, at least to some extent. It can be concluded that as far as one holds on to absolutism, and neglects the functions of reason giving, the Machiavellian challenge remains unresolved and an ethics in the field of politics and administration a chimera.

This conclusion has clear consequences for the academic study of Administrative Ethics, as well as for the curricula of courses in Ethics. For the study of ethics it demands a further development and articulation of a virtue ethics that comprehensively and consistently includes public discourse, public deliberation and accountability. The importance of revitalization of virtue ethics in public administration has also in other contexts been pointed out by others (for instance Cooper 1987, 1998; Oakley 2001; Lynch 2001; Macaulay 2006; Dobel 1999) Yet the role of accountability and public deliberation within a virtue ethical approach, especially when dealing with dilemmas still remains underdeveloped.

The conclusion of this paper also has consequences for curricula of courses in administrative ethics. It implies that virtue ethics should not be presented simply as one of many theoretical approaches, but as one that is able to deal with a basic challenge in politics and administration. The conclusion supports the efforts of Cooper, Sherman and others to develop ways to introduce virtue ethics in specific fields of public service and public service education, not in the least that of war and emergency (Sherman 2005; Cooper 1987; Toner 2000; Nielsen 2006).

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[9] In her wide ranging book Benner (2009) tries to show that Machiavelli stood much closer to ancient Greek ethical thinking than has been acknowledged so far. She presents his work as a straightforward exponent of the classical virtue ethical tradition. By proceeding in that way she in fact answers the 'Machiavellian challenge' by virtue ethically (re)interpreting his work so that the challenge does not arise. Eventually her approach, and the one presented in this paper, both lead to the same conclusion: virtue ethics offers a promising route for a viable political and administrative ethics.

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