

## OUR MORALS THE ETHICS OF REVOLUTION

Norman Geras

**There were two 'Reigns of Terror', if we would but remember it and consider it; the one wrought murder in hot passion, the other in heartless cold blood; the one lasted mere months, the other had lasted a thousand years.**

Mark Twain

**The restraint of war is the beginning of peace.**

Michael Walzer

In this essay I shall be concerned with what can be termed, broadly, the **ethics** of revolution. I consider by what normative principles socialists might be guided, whether in judgement or in action, when it comes to revolutionary change. A comprehensive treatment of the issue would require more space than I have here. It would involve not only a theory – be it of needs or of rights or of justice – for the comparative assessment of social and political institutions, a large enough desideratum, evidently, in itself; but also, with it, the resolution of some deep questions in moral philosophy. I shall have some things to say about all this. But I cannot deal with it, so to speak, from the bottom up. In much, I have to proceed instead assertively, relying where I can on the advocacy of others, or on the belief simply that a needed argument could be supplied. The procedure allows me to use what space I have for concentration upon a narrower purpose.

Roughly indicated, this is to argue that socialist discussion of revolutionary ethics (or such of it as is known to me), and the discussion in particular of ends and means, tends to be framed in abstract generalities of a sort which yields neither specific rules or norms of conduct nor much practical guidance for concrete cases; and to suggest that there is a lot to be learned here, by way of trying to repair the deficiency, from another tradition of discourse altogether. The obvious relevance of this other tradition to the moral problems of revolution makes it the more surprising that socialists have drawn so little upon it.

I shall use the term 'revolution' as encompassing at once a standard Marxist and a more limited meaning. That is, I intend by it the overthrow or very radical transformation, within a relatively brief period, of the basic economic

and social **relations** of a society; or of its governing political institutions; or both. The definition is made to cover what are called political, as well as what are called social revolutions. So understood, revolutions need not involve the use of violence. But the problems to be discussed here arise from the fact that they generally do. By 'violence' I shall mean roughly the exercise of physical force so as to kill or injure, inflict direct harm or pain on, human beings. This is in one way narrower, in another broader, than alternative definitions. It is narrower by excluding damage to property; broader because it includes not just that killing, injuring and so on, which is illegal **and/or** presumed illegitimate, but all such action irrespective of the ends to which it is directed. Whatever may be said in other respects for competing definitions, the one chosen permits a focus on what is most contentious under the rubric of revolutionary means and without foreclosing the moral questions **involved**.<sup>1</sup>

My discussion is premised on the rejection of two attitudes. One of these is that the use of violence is never justified. The other is that, with regard to political or to revolutionary political violence, no question of justification arises. About the first attitude, I will only say that where it is genuine, held scrupulously, consistently, on pacifist-type grounds, it is a doctrine that would deprive people of all weapons save passive resistance in the face of any oppression or threat, however terrible. If that is not a sufficient case against it, I am unsure what could be. As to the second attitude, this can rest upon a certain kind of Marxist notion about the inevitability or 'immanence' of the ends and the means of socialism; or upon a would-be political realism such as goes back as far at least as Machiavelli. The politicians or soldiers, militants or supporters, of any revolution, it may be said on one or the other basis, will do what they must. All talk of justification, of norms of conduct or ethical appraisal in this area, is idle chatter. No treatment of the ethics of revolution would be serious, in my view, that did not give due weight to considerations of historical realism and to the operation of social determinants and constraints. But these never fully close down the space of political choice and individual decision. To that, moral as well as other standards of judgement are relevant.

## I

I begin by providing some necessary context for the problem I wish to address. First, then, people may legitimately revolt against what used commonly to be known as tyranny and is now often termed political oppression. 'The tyranny of established governments,' as it has recently been put, 'gives rise to a right of revolution, held individually by each subject or citizen, rightly exercised by any group of them, of which they cannot be **deprived**.'<sup>2</sup> This is not a novel nor a specifically socialist thought. It was propounded by, among others, John Locke; who, to the anticipated line of criticism that it was 'destructive to the peace of the world', replied: 'they may as well say,

upon the same ground, that honest men may not oppose robbers or pirates, because this may occasion disorder or bloodshed.' The analogy suggests both a notion of revolution as a defensive act and the basis on which it is held to be so and to be therefore justified (when it is). This is the basis – expressed also in the contemporary formulation just cited – of a concept of fundamental rights. As Locke immediately goes on to add regarding robbers and pirates, 'If any mischief come in such cases, it is not to be charged upon him who defends his own **right**.'<sup>3</sup> Moral justification for revolutionary violence against tyranny, however, does not have to rest on this basis. It can rest equally on a reckoning up of consequences, on the estimate that the costs in suffering of having to endure arbitrary or oppressive authority are greater than those of destroying it.<sup>4</sup> Irrespective of whether argument about these things is best made by formal appeal to a doctrine of rights, or by such consequentialist judgements, or by some combination of the two, I shall allow myself to speak loosely of a 'right' of revolution wherever revolutionary methods are justified – as they are in the case of tyranny.

Second, there is a right of revolution against grave social injustice: if the basic social relations of any order of society involve that, then a struggle for their expeditious transformation is legitimate. This entails that there is a right of revolution against any state which is a bastion against such effort to remove serious, systemic injustice. It entails it but is not equivalent to it. For, conceivably, the state itself might be able to be the instrument of revolutionary transformation. In other terms: where there is a right of social revolution on account of grave injustice there is not necessarily a right of political revolution; but there is one when the state is or becomes a bastion of that injustice.

Many people who call themselves socialists think capitalist societies are marked by grave injustice, and many of these many think also that some of it is systemic rather than incidental injustice. If we are right to think this, those of us who do, then the right of **revolution** against grave injustice yields a right of revolution against capitalism. Even so, the existence within some capitalist societies of institutions of parliamentary democracy, and of those other legal and civil institutions and norms now typically associated with it, leads to some familiar disagreements about what forms such a revolution might and should take in the societies in question. If, or where, parliamentary-democratic capitalist states are not – or are not necessarily – bastions of capitalist injustice but, as democracies, the possible vehicles of a social revolution against it, there is no need for political revolution and there is no justification for it. But if, on the other hand, even parliamentary-democratic capitalist states, as capitalist states, are such bastions, there is **one**.<sup>5</sup> I will return to this matter later. It suffices for my main purpose to say that there is a right of revolution against any bastions of capitalist injustice that there are, for there are some.

Note that in resting this right on grave injustice I do not ground it on any claim, such as is sometimes made in this sort of context, that all injustice is

itself a kind of violence. Though backed by the threat and periodic use, now more, now less frequent, of violence, there are forms of injustice distinct from it. To put this differently, there are other evils in the world than violence. To argue that (some) violence is justified in a struggle against them, one has no need to extend its core meaning, as given above, to embrace them all. There are here, as Ted Honderich has written, 'two orders of fact, each of them compelling, each of them terrible'.<sup>6</sup> That order of fact I am calling grave injustice may be formulated, as with tyranny, in terms of a notion of fundamental rights; or in terms of basic needs; or of exploitation; or of equality; or, as is in fact most usual owing to conceptual interdependencies here, of some combination of these. Once more, I set this aside. Capitalist societies, though there are great differences between them, ones that really matter, are gravely unjust on any of these criteria.

There is a right of revolution against tyranny and against any bastion of grave social injustice, including capitalist forms of it. Surveying the contemporary world for examples of these things, we are, unhappily, spoilt for choice. But an example that may be expected to carry the maximum possible number of readers along with the argument that revolution is sometimes justified is South Africa.

Now, what is morally permissible in the pursuit of a just revolutionary struggle? (By a 'just' revolutionary struggle I mean one to which there is a right, in my loose sense, however that right is founded as regards bedrock ethical theory.) What can be done, and what if anything may not be done? Are there limits to the means that may be used, and what, if so, are they? What are the broad principles by which we might try to decide them?

I dispose in short order of one kind of answer to these questions. This is that in any such struggle the means must be prefigurative of the ends in view. Setting aside some problems about its precise meaning – for what does a quantity of timber prefigure: a scaffold or a barn? and what the laying down of weapons: a return of peace? or impending massacre? – one may concede a value to some such rough idea. If we can exemplify, can display, our good ends in the good ways and means we use to achieve them, so much the better. But in the present context means cannot in general only reflect the ends in view, because they will also reflect their own beginnings, so to put it. They are doubly determined: not only by what they are intended to achieve, the putative goal, but by that situation which is their starting point as well. It is in the nature of the problem under discussion – of revolution – that this starting point has ugly features, including the mobilization of violence on its behalf. How could the means of opposing it not reflect some of that ugliness, how, even in trying to prefigure a better future, avoid being scarred by an awful past? Shooting at the direct agents of a hated tyranny is still killing people; it is a state of war and, as such, not 'prefigurative' of human harmony or even of reasonably tolerable social order, though it may be necessary in order to achieve that. To point this out is just to insist on an indispensable minimum

of realism. All the same, it may then be said, revolutionary means must at least prefigure their intended ends to some, large extent. But to what extent? Which non-prefigurative means, if one is going to speak in this way, may, and which if **any** may not be used in a just revolutionary struggle? The notion of prefiguration gives no determinate answer to our question, merely another (and in my view unhelpful) language in which to formulate it.<sup>7</sup>

Let us see, then, if there is guidance to be had from what is perhaps the dominant form of argument in socialist discussions of revolution, and in the literature on justifications for political violence more generally. I refer to argument of a consequentialist kind concerning the costs and benefits of projected or anticipated violence relative to those of a continuation of the *status quo*. In the words of one writer, we can make 'rough consequentialist calculations' in the following spirit: 'revolutionary violence is only justified when, of the alternatives available, it will, everything considered, make for less misery and human degradation all around.' The common idea he so expresses is of what Barrington Moore has called a 'calculus of **suffering**'.<sup>8</sup> It should be noted, however, that consequentialist judgement in this connection does not have to rest, as these formulations suggest it at least might, on some form of philosophical utilitarianism. It need not be unified by reliance on the single measure of **suffering/happiness**. It could take a more pluralistic form, with the use of a number of indices (**happiness/welfare** and, say, freedom, or equality) not thought reducible one to another.<sup>9</sup> There is even possible here what I shall term a consequentialism of rights: that is to say, a view that there are basic rights, worth fighting for when infringed, but under a restriction of 'proportionality'; such as would oblige one to compare violations of rights likely to result from the fighting with 'those it intends to **rectify**'.<sup>10</sup>

Assume, anyway, that the sort of rough calculation envisaged points to a revolutionary struggle being justified. Then at least theoretically, two kinds of limit on the choice of means would seem to be derivable from these forms of reasoning, a qualitative and a quantitative one. It is not the case that anything whatsoever could be shown to be – though, of course, anything could be said to be – legitimate in a just revolutionary cause on the basis of consequentialist reasoning. For, first, the means chosen must be apt. They must be efficacious means (by which I do not mean they must be guaranteed of success, merely able in principle to achieve the projected end; every revolution runs some significant risk of defeat). As the point was put by **Trotsky** in a well-known discussion of these issues: 'That is permissible. . . which **really** leads to the liberation of mankind,' and 'Precisely from this it flows that **not** all means are **permissible**'.<sup>11</sup> Not anything, in other words, could work. Second, it is in the nature of the approach we are presently considering that from a range of alternative means all judged to be efficacious in principle, those that are least costly, by the indices of cost thought to matter, must be chosen. This would presumably exclude unnecessary or excessive violence: that is, all violence surplus to what is needed to win the struggle, even

if such surplus violence would leave a balance in favour of revolution in the overall calculation. We have, then, a requirement of efficacy, with the attached proviso of minimum necessary force. If we now ask, however, what in particular is allowed and what ruled out by these two principles, or even what kinds of action or policy are permitted and excluded, the answer is far from clear. As **Trotsky** himself says in the same place: 'These criteria do not, of course, give a ready answer to the question as to what is permissible and what is not permissible in each separate case. . . Problems of revolutionary morality are fused with the problems of revolutionary strategy and tactics.'

But we must press the question, for we need more than this. That one's means should be efficacious and no more violent than necessary is, as a code of revolutionary ethics, a bit thin. So: what in particular, what in the way specifically of violence and its various forms, might be excluded by the two principles? Within the broad consequentialist framework we are exploring, there are in fact, if no precise answers here, at least responses in contrasting spirit. One of them is Trotsky's own: namely, that not very much can be excluded. Another is that some things – surely – must be. As to the first, **Trotsky** is quite forthright about it: 'the warring classes will seek to gain victory by every means.'<sup>12</sup> We may take it he does not intend by this to contradict his own emphatic statement that not all means are allowed; that he intends only, that beyond the requirement of their being efficacious for the end of liberation, the means of revolution cannot be further morally constrained. He is, at any rate, consistent in using formulations to the effect that the revolutionary class struggle is, or is always likely to become, a form of total war in which conventional moral limits go by the board. Thus he writes, 'The highest form of the class struggle is civil war which explodes into mid-air all moral ties between the hostile classes'; and 'To attempt to subordinate it to abstract "norms" means in fact to disarm the workers in the face of an enemy armed to the teeth.' The workers, **Trotsky** says further, must be free from the 'fiction' of 'transcendental morality.' His view, it will be evident, is harmonious with a famous formula of Lenin's about the dictatorship of the proletariat: 'The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is rule won and maintained by the use of violence by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, rule that is unrestricted by any laws.'<sup>13</sup>

In other socialist writing **there** has been a different inflection: even from within the overall consequentialist approach, a concern to uphold at least some general **moral** prohibitions. What is most illuminating about it, however, is the ambiguity of the terms in which it is typically expressed. **Herbert Marcuse**, for example, defending the rationality of historical judgement concerning the likely all-round effects of any revolution for human freedom and happiness, insists nevertheless on the unimpaired validity of certain 'general norms'. No matter how rationally one might justify revolutionary means by such historical reckoning, he says, 'there are forms of violence and suppression which no revolutionary situation can justify because they negate the very

end for which the revolution is a means.' He mentions specifically in this connection 'cruelty, and indiscriminate terror'. Anthony Arblaster argues similarly. He affirms, following Trotsky, that the principle of efficacy (that the means chosen must 'really' be means to the end in view) will disqualify some putative means; and equally that this does not take us very far as a guide to action. Still, there are means, he holds, that so 'contradict' the ends of liberation that they must be ruled out for the Left. He mentions specifically 'cruelty or torture'.

The question here is what precisely the point is of saying that means such as these 'negate' or 'contradict' the given end. Is it that they could not contribute to its achievement? Or that they are 'never justified, however admirable the end they may actually **advance**'?<sup>14</sup> Are they disqualified because they could not work? Or even if they could? If the first, then we do not have a separate consideration from that of efficacy. We have no restriction upon the exercise of consequentialist calculation. One is bound to ask, therefore, why just these means – **cruelty**, terror, torture – are picked out by name for exclusion. Why could they not simply be reckoned up with everything else? If they were never efficacious in a just cause, that would ensure their exclusion. One gets the strong sense here of a worry lest this kind of reckoning should sometimes yield the wrong result, lest these means might turn out in some circumstances to be efficacious even in a just cause; and of an impulse, consequently, to put them beyond calculation. So they should be put. **But** placed **as we** are in this case before the second of the two possibilities, that these means are to be disqualified, then, irrespective of considerations of efficacy, we are bound to pose another question. Why should consequentialist calculation stop precisely here and not earlier or elsewhere, with other forms of violence? Why are just these the limits? If it is said, because the means in question are especially horrible, indeed they are. But neither of the writers whose views we are considering would be – or have been – willing to say that those forms of violence justifiable within a legitimate revolutionary struggle, killing, for example, or maiming by trying but failing to kill, are not horrible at all. So, by what criteria are we to say when horrible means have become too horrible to countenance?

There is insufficient determinacy in the positions we have had before us up to now. They give us only the most general of notions, whether about efficacy and the weighing of consequences or about some hypothetical but unexplained limits to this. General notions, to be sure, are better than nothing. **But** if they are too general to yield any more precise guidance, they may well come to nothing under the pressures of revolutionary conflict. Trotsky's approach states clearly one of the logics of a just revolutionary struggle: the moral importance of winning. What matters is what will succeed, and the indeterminacy lies in it being hard to say in the abstract what will. The other approach states another logic, that there must surely be moral limits of some kind to what could be justified, even in order to win. **But** it states it **unclearly**;

its indeterminacy lies in the difficulty of defining where such limits fall and why. Some effort of definition is, however, indispensable.

To appreciate more fully the need for it, one has only to reflect a moment on some typical circumstances of revolution. First, if it has indeed come to revolution, then an enormous amount is at stake. For, as not only Marx but also Locke pointed out, and contrary to a myth common with more vulgar forms of conservatism, revolutions are not easily stirred up.<sup>15</sup> Where it has come to a **revolutionary** struggle, the regime or order – the situation – against which this is directed is generally not just bad but terrible: whether in terms of basic rights, of misery and suffering, or other indices of human cost. And this is to say nothing about such further, often frightful, costs as may be imposed, in the event of a defeat, by the opponents of revolution. Second, and as nearly all theoretical reflection on political violence unites in emphasizing, against this backdrop there are also very large uncertainties. Which means will be efficacious and which not and which be counter-productive? What violence is necessary to the goals of revolution and what violence excessive? In general, how much confidence can there be in judgements about these matters made under great pressure? Two overarching questions may serve to organize the whole range here. Given what is likely to be at stake, can a revolutionary movement afford to forswear in advance the use of any means from which it might conceivably derive advantage? On the other hand, given the uncertainties, in what ways, and how far, may it legitimately by its actions put the lives or persons of others in jeopardy, how far contravene the general moral rules or norms which serve (when they do serve) to protect these?

The issues are extremely difficult. We need clearer lines. As one more way of bringing this into focus, the difficulty and the need alike, I want now to consider some arguments in Steven Lukes's recent, widely-noticed critique of the moral record of Marxism. The latter, according to Lukes, 'has from its beginning exhibited a certain approach to moral questions that has disabled it from offering moral resistance to measures taken in its name.' Having no satisfactory account of justice and rights; concerned, as a form of long-range consequentialism, with optimal outcomes rather than 'agent-centred restrictions'; morally blind, in the pursuit of large **emancipatory** goals, to the present interests of living persons; Marxism could not deal adequately with 'injustice, violations of rights. . . the resort to impermissible means'. It 'has never come properly to grips with the means-ends issue, and the problem of dirty hands.' I find much to quarrel with in the balance of Lukes's account but I shall pass over it, as some of the necessary critical points have already been well made by others. The problem of means and ends and ruthless solutions to it are not weaknesses special to Marxism, nor is subordinating the interests of living persons to a projected larger good or goal; they seem nicely distributed across the political spectrum. Many of the Marxist texts Lukes cites in support of his case evince a greater awareness of the complexity of these matters than he **allows**.<sup>16</sup> There is in the present

context a more important thing to be pursued. Lukes makes a valid point, one which Marxists – amongst others – ought to digest. But it is vitiated by the fact that he does not face up squarely either to the kind of background against which the questions here at issue arise or to the difficulty of proposing definite answers to them.

Marxist discussion of ends and means has been deficient; that is true. As was part of my purpose to illustrate in what has gone before, it has not produced an adequately determinate code of revolutionary ethics or conduct. It is also the case, as I go on to argue, that remedying this deficiency must mean giving weight to 'agent-centred restrictions': to individual rights. To the extent that Marxists have often been wary of or hostile to concepts of rights, they have not been well-placed to resolve these issues satisfactorily. Lukes's book valuably draws attention to this. The difficulty it fails to address is that of how far the oppressed are morally obliged to respect the rights of their oppressors. May slaves not kill their masters or overseers, or wound them in attempting to escape? May they tear them limb from limb? Or only seek to overpower them? Or what? There are rights – to life, against personal violation, and so on – involved here. How far must the victims and opponents of an unjust or tyrannical regime respect the rights of its defenders, supporters, beneficiaries? There is not an unlimited range of answers to this sort of question. We may take it, from the whole spirit of Lukes's approach, that he would not say these rights should be set at naught. The gross alternatives remaining are, then, to treat them as absolute, inviolable in all circumstances, or to give them some weight. Again, I discount the first of these alternatives: it appears clear from much that Lukes says that to put forward a variety of socialist pacifism is not his intention. The rights, therefore, even of oppressors, even of the defenders, supporters, beneficiaries, of injustice or tyranny, are to be given some weight.

How much? Which rights, all or only some of them, and what sort of weight? A general emphasis upon individual rights is, I have already said, of value in this context. But as an answer to the real problems posed by revolution, it is, in so general, so indeterminate a form, not only not better than the kind of consequentialism Lukes criticizes, it may turn out in practice to be no different from it. For, if all we can say is that (some?) rights must be taken seriously or more seriously than a lot of Marxists have been disposed to take them, that they must be given some or even a lot of weight, they are thereby in effect just thrown in with all other considerations, thrown into some overall calculation or comparison or judgement. When very much is at stake, in situations of dire pressure, they may not then count for enough, the broad emphasis on their importance notwithstanding. The point may be made clearer by adverting once more to Trotsky's contention that revolution comes down to a form of war and as such cannot be constrained by general or transcendental moral norms. Now, actually, revolution is not always or at once generalized war. Still, the relation between it, civil war and wider

warfare has been close enough historically to highlight the obvious point that revolutions typically involve the most intense conflicts; conflicts as must make at least some rights and what they protect forfeit. Set against this background, there is nothing whatever specifically Marxist about Trotsky's reasoning. On the contrary, as Michael Walzer has written in a work systematically critical of such reasoning: 'Either fight all-out or not at all. This argument is often said to be typical of American (!) thought, but in fact it is universal in the history of war.'

Trotsky's view **has**, I believe, to be rejected. But we are better placed to reject it if we recognize it for what it is, not some specially Marxist form of ruthlessness, but an argument about human warfare which politicians and generals of every stripe have been known to voice: that 'for the sake of the cause', 'for justice', because of 'the moral urgency of victory', one must fight without **restraint**.<sup>17</sup> And we are better placed to reject it if we recognize also that where rights and lives and life chances are in general jeopardy, whether owing to war or to revolution or to those circumstances that make revolution justifiable, there general affirmations of the importance of rights are insufficient, as insufficient as the plea for prefigurative forms of struggle; more precise discriminations are required. The second recognition follows close upon the first.

It is for the same reason as I find Lukes's argument insufficient that I am unhappy also with the conclusion drawn by Kate **Soper** in the otherwise pertinent criticisms of it to which I have already once made reference. She too finds the bare appeal to 'respect for the principle of individual rights' inadequate. But she goes on to conclude, in a way quite as indeterminate as Lukes's own, that 'no absolute rule applies'; that 'all situations requiring moral decision are concrete and have to be judged on their merits'; that to act morally is 'to act in the light of general rules', but sometimes also 'in contradiction with one or other' of them. As she says further:

I am put in mind here of E. P. Thompson's recommendation that humanist attitudes should find expression 'whenever and to the degree that contingencies allow', and of his come-back to his exasperated critics: 'what else can one say? That they must always find expression irrespective of contingencies?' The argument seems clumsy, somehow unsatisfactory – yet in essence I think it is the right one. On the other hand, the morality it implies is not easy to formulate or render into a coherent whole, since it requires us to combine respect for the individual with an agreement to waive that respect in certain conditions.<sup>18</sup>

Whatever might be said about this as a general observation on the nature of moral choice, for the sort of circumstances to which we here must apply it I think it is, and not merely seems, unsatisfactory. 'To the degree that contingencies allow': that is not a happy formula for a socialist or revolutionary ethic. Nor is: agreement to waive respect for the individual 'in certain conditions'. It is all too easy to envisage either of them as a recipe for complete moral cynicism. Of course, this is not the spirit in which **Soper**

intends them; the very opposite. Even so, neither formula is helpful. By their nature they do nothing at all to delimit the ways in which, or the extent to which, 'contingencies' and 'conditions' may be permitted to displace 'general rules'. If such rules do not themselves incorporate at least the more likely, the more easily foreseeable, conditions and contingencies, then they are no good.

We only need to think about how these formulations, as well as all the others earlier reviewed, might bear upon a concrete case, to be brought face to face with their limitations. The South African state today is for the large majority of those subject to it a vicious tyranny. It is a bastion of grave injustice if such there be. The black people of that country are deprived of the most elementary political rights, and the violence mobilized against them, well-documented, widely broadcast – sjambok–wielding police violence and then more deadly than that; an epidemic of torture; 'accidental' death in police custody; one of the highest rates of judicial execution in the world, its victims nearly all black; Latin American style 'disappearances', the kidnapping and murder of chosen individuals by freelance death squads with who knows what degree of connivance and participation by the 'security' services of the state – this violence stands between an entire people and its goal of a more just and happier condition. That a counter-violence of opposition to such a regime could not be justified, because political violence in general cannot ever be, is a view I have already rejected. Here then, in turn, are some of the kinds of thing that occurred in South Africa during 1985 and 1986, years of a great wave of black resistance and struggle, before these were set back by the imposition of a state of emergency in June of the latter year. Bombs were placed in or near police stations, in the offices of the South African Defence Force, in one case in a shopping centre; the explosions caused death and injury. Black policemen and town councillors were attacked and killed. So were suspected police informers and collaborators, and individuals buying from certain shops in violation of a campaign of economic boycott. Sometimes such people were attacked in their homes and members of their families harmed. Often they were killed in shockingly brutal ways. 'One particularly cruel form of killing, known as the necklace, is to put a burning tyre around the neck of a victim who then dies a slow and painful death.'<sup>19</sup>

Now, how could we discriminate, on the basis of what we have from this discussion so far, of the putative ethic of revolution any of it might be thought to define, as to the legitimacy or otherwise of these several actions? Even if, as I suspect is likely, it may be said here that it is not for us so to discriminate, because it is not our struggle – a view I shall in due course also reject – still, how then could the participants in that struggle, or the leaders of it, discriminate? How much would it help anyone to be told that the means of struggle must 'really' be means to the liberation of the majority of South Africans, or must not too obviously 'negate' or 'contradict' that end, or must take some significant account of individual rights, or must respect these to the degree

that 'contingencies' allow, or must only waive them 'in certain conditions'? In truth, it would help them precious little; for all that some of these arguments do have a value as very general guidelines. The socialist discussion of ends and means is wanting in specificity. We need to look elsewhere.

## II

Where I shall suggest we need to look is by now perhaps obvious. It is to the theory and practice of war: more specifically, to just war doctrine and, via that, to some of the rules of actual warfare. I introduce the topic on a semi-personal note. My own reason initially for looking to this material, what I sought there, and what on the other hand I found, are two different things. For, what I sought in starting to think again in a general way about the ethics of revolution were the considerations typically adduced to legitimate war, the commonest grounds for war being qualified as 'just'. I sought them as a way of focusing on the weakness in political viewpoints – some kinds of contemporary liberalism, most kinds of conservatism – generally hostile to revolution, yet at the same time more than willing to countenance the moral necessity, in certain circumstances, of war. In the event, that turns out to be light work. If war is sometimes justified, then so too is revolution, the reasons given on their behalf being of a kind: self-defence, autonomy, rights and freedoms, the throwing off of an oppressor, and so forth. All of this falls under the heading, one side of a distinction which is central in the literature, of *jus ad bellum*: the justice *of* war. What I found, however, not in the sense of having been altogether unaware of it before, but in the sense of coming to realize here was matter germane to the problems of socialist ethics and yet not much brought to bear upon them – what I found was the other side of the same distinction, namely *jus in bello*, justice *in* war: a body of doctrine concerning the methods of legitimate warfare, whether or not in a just cause; rules applicable to both parties; the obligation to fight even against aggression within certain moral *limits*.<sup>20</sup>

The most striking feature of this literature and indeed domain, coming at it from the angle we here do, is the contrast between the relative poverty, the underdevelopment, of socialist principles for revolutionary conduct, and the wealth of the rules of war, the fullness and determinacy of *jus in bello*. The number, the detail and the complexity of these rules, and of the qualifications to them, do stand out in the comparison. There are rules about combatant and non-combatant status, about the wounded and those rendered helpless in combat, about giving quarter to surrendering soldiers. There are rules defining the rights and obligations of prisoners of war, and concerning warfare at sea, and about the conduct of sieges. There are rules defining rights of neutrality and rules about partisan warfare. There are prohibitions on certain kinds of weapons. And so on. Such a list is in fact but a poor indication of the extent of the contrast: on one side, only the vaguest of notions; on the other,

a vast and detailed literature, not to speak of well-developed international codes and conventions.

Now; it may be said that all these rules are much violated in the course of real war and so they are. But the point is that there exist, nevertheless, definite rules and that they are observed often enough to be of value. It is not difficult, again, to speculate on some possible reasons for the contrast. Wars are fought in the main between states and though states clearly have an interest in breaking the rules of war, otherwise they would do less of this than they in fact do, there must be enough of a common interest among them in having codes of rules for these to have evolved to the point they have. Few states, however, if any, can have an interest in drawing up, much less in observing, a comparable code of rules to govern possible revolutionary struggles against them. Oppressive regimes, it may therefore also be said, will use – do use, across the globe – the most savage forms of violence in the counter-revolutionary cause: use terror, torture, massacre. But those are their crimes. They are their morals; they cannot be ours. Whatever the interests of any state may be, there are reasons why a socialist ethic of revolution must embody a precise code of moral limits and moral rules.

Within the multiplicity of rules that apply to the waging of war, two principal types are relevant in the present context. One of them concerns the category of persons at whom violence may be directed: those who are legitimate targets of attack, who may be killed. The other concerns the manner of attack: how or in what circumstances they may be killed.<sup>21</sup> I shall consider each type in turn with a view to its bearing upon our subject.

Rules of the first sort draw a distinction between combatants and non-combatants. Under the concept of non-combatant immunity, they delineate a large area – the many people – off limits to any violent attack. In the context of war, this distinction, very roughly, is between soldiers on the one hand, and 'innocent' civilians on the other. It is important, however, that the notion of innocence involved in it is a special one. It has nothing to do with judgements of moral culpability. The soldier may be a reluctant conscript and the civilian an avid supporter of the war, even contributing time and effort to sustaining or boosting a war-fighting morale. The point is only that soldiers constitute, have made themselves or been made by others into, a threat. As, literally, the warriors of one or other side, those directly making war and so putting lives and persons in jeopardy, they are legitimately subject to violence themselves. There is an analogy with a justified act of self-defence outside of war: one may use deadly force against somebody threatening one's life if that is the only possibility of escape, irrespective of the attacker's motives or moral character, of whether or not he or she was egged on by others, and so on. Also important here is the circumstance that, as with many such distinctions, where the line falls exactly may be a difficult matter, a matter of some contention; the crucial thing is that there is a line. As Dr. Johnson said, apparently: 'the fact of twilight does not mean you cannot tell day from

night.' So, in modern war the category of combatant has been extended to include munitions workers (but only as engaged in, when at their place of, work). It does not, however, include workers processing soldiers' rations. Manufacturing their weaponry counts as a contribution to the threat, while making what they need simply as **human** beings does **not**.<sup>22</sup>

Applying this now to the case of a regime against which, on account of tyranny or injustice, there is a right of revolution, the distinction must be made between its direct agents of oppression and everybody else. Here again there are **likely** to be difficult and contentious borderline instances. But the boundary needs to be quite narrowly drawn which defines such a regime's combatants. They are its leaders, soldiers, police, security agents, jailers, torturers; in general, those waning on its behalf, those involved in imposing and enforcing oppressive **laws**.<sup>23</sup> That would include, as in the South African case, known police informers and collaborators (a matter to which I return), but would not, without more ado, include just every kind of state employee; teachers, say, or health workers. And it would not include, either, the civilian population at large, even such sectors of this as may be open supporters or beneficiaries of the regime in question. If it is said here that political supporters or economic beneficiaries of an oppressive regime are *ipso facto* the enemies of its victims and therefore legitimate targets of revolutionary violence, it may be noted simply, in anticipation of the argument I later make against this, that much the same could be said about the civilians of an enemy power in time of war – in order to justify massacring them. It is a line of thought, of justification and of action that certainly occurs in war, but one also, I presume, that would give most socialists pause.

In its struggle for the liberation of **Guiné** from colonial rule, the PAIGC made a distinction between 'the Portuguese people. . . Portuguese individuals or families' and 'Portuguese colonialism': it was fighting, it said, against the latter and not the former. In the South African context there are public statements also from the ANC to the effect that the targets of its armed struggle are police and military ones; not **civilians**.<sup>24</sup> These discriminations agree with a 'political code. . . roughly analogous to the laws of war', one less respected, according to Michael Walzer, in our own century than in the **last**.<sup>25</sup> But it is a code, in any case, which many of us – overtly or not, some of us perhaps only half-consciously – refer to or make use of in a rough and ready way in thinking about these matters, and whether we are fully aware or not of the military analogy. It is a better instrument for the assessment of putatively revolutionary means than the various formulae I began by reviewing. It enables us to say, for example, that setting bombs against military and police personnel or installations is, where there is a right of revolution, a legitimate means of it, while bombing supermarkets or shopping centres, restaurants and other such venues is not. To be precise here: doing this is not, or is not only, a 'mistake', tactically, politically. It is a moral wrong, a crime. So clearly, according to a principle of non-combatant immunity

adapted to the revolutionary setting, are the taking and killing of innocent hostages; making targets of people because of their country of origin, or of the airline they are travelling with, or of their destination; or because they are bourgeois, or are captains of industry, or settlers, or members of a particular ethnic group. So, generally, is terrorism in the true sense: the use of more or less random violence against whole populations. It is clearer to say of this, of indiscriminate terror, that it is wrong because it is making war on people who are not themselves **making** war, than that it negates the ends of revolution.

Trotsky, in *Their Morals* and *Ours*, mocks the distinction I here uphold, for his part defending, with reference to Bolshevik policy during the Russian civil war, the practice of taking hostages. The arguments behind the mockery, however, blur two significant points. Civil war, he contends, as the most severe of all forms of war, 'is unthinkable not only without violence against tertiary figures but, under contemporary technique, without killing old men, old women and children.' The difference between shooting soldiers at the front and shooting hostages, between open battle and 'the seizure of non-participants', he dismisses as 'a wretched and stupid evasion': many participants are just duped or unwilling conscripts; the means of modern war inevitably kill thousands of non-participants; those taken as hostages 'are at least bound by ties of class and family solidarity with one of the camps, or with the leaders of that camp.'<sup>26</sup> The first thing wrong with these arguments has already been spoken of. Because many who fight are blameless, more or less, for the war in which they fight, the boundary around the legitimate targets of war is quickly – massively – relaxed: to take in very large numbers of people whose existence and activities are not directly menacing. Innocence in one sense legitimates the deliberate killing of innocents in another. Trotsky's point is made in connection specifically with the practice of hostage taking. The formula, however, 'ties of class and family solidarity', is one, imaginably, of even larger-scale horror. It is an awful one.

Secondly, under the heading of 'contemporary technique', Trotsky too easily elides the difference between deliberately killing or injuring non-combatants and doing so unintentionally, even if as an effect of one's intended ends. I have not the space adequately to examine the principle normally adduced here, namely that of 'double effect', nor such related notions as 'collateral damage'. They give us no easy solutions anyway; can be, and are often abused. All the same, there is a line, a difficult one once more, which Trotsky's way of speaking casually dissolves. The principle of double effect, briefly and incompletely stated, permits an act likely to have some evil consequences, provided that these evils are not part of one's ends, nor means to one's ends; and – on an interpretation of the principle which I am persuaded of – provided also that one seeks to minimize the likely evils or the risk of them, at some cost to oneself.<sup>27</sup> In war, bombing an important military target with the foreseeable side effect of limited civilian casualties (against some rather rough notion of proportionality), this is one thing;

bombing whole cities in order to kill and terrorize civilians and so break their morale is another. So too, arguably, in the sphere of revolutionary struggle, is bombing or burning the home of a police or other official, and (members of) his or her family with it.

A sense of proportion will not come amiss as regards the nature of Trotsky's argument and the policies it defends. I say this not in order **back-**handedly to condone the view I have just criticized, merely as a necessary point in these times about Marxism's place in the world. The argument and the policies tell **against Trotsky** and the Bolsheviks – just as equally brutal arguments and, in cost of lives, worse measures tell against such statesmen of the liberal democracies as Winston Churchill and Harry Truman. There is a hard matter here. But it is about politics and war much more than it is about **Marxism**.<sup>28</sup>

I turn now to rules of the second kind: concerning legitimate modes of attack; setting limits to how those who are properly targets in war may be killed. The basis of these rules, it must be said, is rather less obvious. It may even be the case that the particular prohibitions obtaining at any time against this or that sort of weapon have no other foundation than the formal conventions agreed amongst states. There is a principle, nevertheless, which seems to inform at least some of them and which is of relevance and value in the revolutionary setting. It can be expressed in one way as a notion of minimum force: one's weapons must be capable of stopping enemy combatants, which in the given circumstances involves killing them; but they should not, beyond this, seek gratuitously to accentuate suffering. The same thing can be expressed another way, in a formulation I have adapted from Thomas **Nagel**, by saying that the weapons should attack the combatant and not the person. They should not, therefore, be 'designed to maim or disfigure or torture' him or **her**.<sup>29</sup> Here again I think we have a clearer reason for ruling out 'particularly cruel' weapons and, more generally, cruel methods of killing, the deliberate infliction and aggravation of pain, as in torture, than if we say that these contradict the ends of liberation. Just as only the combatants of the other side may be attacked, because they are the ones making war on you, so too they may be 'stopped', killed, because that puts an end to the threat they have been to you or their contribution to it. Extreme and purposeful cruelty, beyond what is necessarily involved in any act of killing or wounding, is wrong because it is more than their activities can justify – as it were defensively on – your own part. Unless, that is, it is allowed that the ethics of socialism may embody, as a component, some fairly terrible theory of retributive punishment. I assume without argument here that they may not.

A slow, painful death by burning, consequently, lies beyond the limits of what is morally defensible in the light of an ethic of just revolutionary struggle. Likewise, killing an old woman by forcing her to drink the bottle of detergent or cooking oil she has bought in defiance of a shop boycott. (I leave aside the question of whether this defiance can be taken to make of her

an agent of oppression, as I think it cannot. For, there are, anyway, forms of community pressure appropriate to meeting the specific nature of the threat she represents, her challenge to a boycott. This contemptuous cruelty far exceeds *them*.)<sup>30</sup> *Jus ad bellum* is in itself no guarantee of *jus in bello*. The justice of the cause does not make good, cannot transmute, moral atrocities committed in its name. In the case of South Africa, here chosen to exemplify these issues precisely because of the overwhelming justice of the revolutionary cause, the briefest description of certain episodes of violence suffices to communicate a sense of something in them other than the legitimate concerns of a just revolutionary struggle.

**They chased her across the veld, they beat her, they stoned her, they tore her clothes off, they set her on fire, they put a huge rock on her so that she couldn't get up and they rammed a broken bottle into her vagina.**

**As the family cowered in the house, they saw the eldest son, who ran for help grabbed by the mob and dismembered in the street. As the mob burst into the house, [he] shot his younger son in the head to save him from a similar fate.**<sup>31</sup>

At this point I anticipate two types of counsel: one, of historical realism; the other, to speak not of what does not concern you. There is more to be said for the first but I address myself to both. In any historically, or sociologically – or just 'humanly' – informed perspective, there must be an acknowledgement of some limits to the proper reach of moral discourse itself. To let an extreme case illustrate this: if a group of slaves or of prisoners in a concentration camp should, having the opportunity, suddenly get the better of a vicious overseer or guard and brutally slaughter him, it would not be apt to say they had gone too far or to reflect critically on the notion of 'cruel or unusual' punishments. *In extremis*, moral judgement fails. More generally, the violence of oppressors tends to breed violence amongst those they oppress. Their brutalities are brutalizing. A political or social order that must be overthrown by revolution will have generated, not only amongst its defenders but also with some of its victims, impulses of moral criminality and murderousness. An altogether morally 'clean' revolutionary struggle is probably rare, therefore, if it is conceivable. Even so, **two** points need to be emphasized about this.

First, the plea of *in extremis* is just that. It cannot too quickly or easily accommodate every horror generated out of situations of conflict. A young, defenceless woman (subject of the first description above), merely rumoured to be a police agent and perhaps not one, is not a sadistic concentration camp guard. The *son* of a collaborating official (subject of the second description) is not a ruthless slave-driver. Second, even if the perspective of historical realism may make certain occurrences understandable, it does not make them right. It does not make them right, in particular, in the perspective, as important this one as the other, of revolutionary policy and morality. The leaders, the militants, of a movement against injustice are obliged for their

part to try, so far as it is in their power, to bring a disciplined, scrupulous, discriminating, ethical code into the dark history they are fighting to transform. Where understanding, on the one hand, and moral discrimination, on the other – or historical explanation and political choice; or sociological realism and the responsibility of individuals and movements for what they do – where these two meet, come face to face, there is a difficult philosophical issue indeed. Except, however, for the most extreme of determinisms, the first cannot altogether ~~relieve~~ the second of its burdens.

Only the discipline and scruple, incidentally, self-imposed by a revolutionary movement in the light of a defensible code of ethical principles and constraints can serve to mitigate a problem just alluded to and which, as far as I can see, has no genuinely satisfactory solution. This is that, in the context of a just revolutionary struggle, some of those rightly to be regarded as the combatants of tyranny or injustice will not be identified, as others of them are, by uniforms, insignia and the like, and will take some care not to be identified at all. At the same time the possibilities of sound judicial methods for establishing that they are informers, collaborators, agents or what have you, are either limited or non-existent. The danger of individuals being wrongly accused and killed are great. These dangers will be the more severe, obviously, as will be the chances of people resorting to violence to settle a personal score or for some other repugnant motive, if it is the anger of more or less spontaneously formed crowds and not any procedures informed by care or principle that determine an individual's fate.

As for the other counsel, against making judgements from outside on the struggles of others, what can be conceded to it, it seems to me, is only that opinion in these circumstances should not be hasty, but considered. Taken strictly, however, it is an admonition that would have forbidden Western socialists in the 1930s from expressing any criticism of the crimes of Stalin; or, more recently, would have excluded adverse comment upon those of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge. It is not a counsel to be heeded. Reflection on the Stalinist example reveals its effective meaning. For, it was doubtless one consideration in persuading many Western communists and socialists to maintain an uncritical, apologetic, attitude to Stalinist policies and practices which they ought to have condemned. It is a counsel, in fact, to refrain not from judgement as such but only from critical judgement.

Let us make explicit, then, the normative basis of the foregoing argument for extending central notions in just war doctrine to the case of revolutionary struggle. This basis is a principle that individuals have rights – against being killed or violated – rights that may not, in general, be set aside; unless they forfeit them by making war themselves in defence of tyranny or grave injustice. Here, I shall simply ignore the rather large question of whether such rights are the proper axiomatic starting point for an adequate moral doctrine or whether they are, rather, to be derived from other premisses. I bypass this question in a vulgar, practical manner. They are important for

us one way or another: as axiomatic values; or because socialists generally profess a respect for human life and well-being, and rights are a crucial way of embodying that respect, of giving it normative or regulative force against this or that exigency or passion of the moment. As the point was expressed by Victor Serge, a point, in his view, to 'take precedence before all tactical considerations':

*Defence of man. Respect for man. Man must be given his rights, his security, his value. Without these, there is no Socialism. Without these all is false, bankrupt and spoiled. I mean: man whoever he is, be he the meanest of men – 'class-enemy', son or grandson of a bourgeois, I do not care. It must never be forgotten that a human being is a human being.*<sup>32</sup>

This is a necessary sensibility, that must inform every genuine struggle against oppression or injustice. In the circumstances and under the pressures of revolution, as of war, it can only be made effective at all if the conditions in which, and the extent to which the relevant rights may be forfeit are spelled out within very tight limitation. This must mean in an 'individualized' way. Otherwise, the rights, as individual rights, are not worth a fig. Whatever problems there may be, for example, in setting boundaries around the category of 'combatant', the principle from just war theory that 'no one can be forced to fight or to risk [their] life, no one can be threatened with war or warred against' if they have not 'surrendered or lost [their] rights' through warring **themselves**,<sup>33</sup> is a better one not only than Trotsky's 'ties of class and family solidarity'; but also than this, sequel to the passage quoted earlier, from Kate **Soper**: 'if one is a socialist in outlook then one feels obliged to recognize that individuals not only have immediate personal rights and duties but are also answerable for the larger social consequences of their collective individual acts, and that consistent failure to act on the obligations incurred at the social level is legitimate ground for challenging their entitlement to respect for their personal **rights**.'<sup>34</sup> This is far too open-ended in range of possible application. It is unthinkable that it was so intended, but it would legitimate the most widespread violation of personal rights, which means violation of individuals and of lives. How many people are not guilty of failing in their social 'obligations', in **Soper's** sense, in a world that is rife with avoidable miseries, inequities and iniquities? It cannot be right virtually to erase the distinction, as this argument by implication does, between those actively warring to sustain oppression, and others less directly related to it: supporters and beneficiaries, passive accomplices or mere bystanders; people who, whatever their moral faults, guilts or evasions, have not – or at least have not yet – made themselves into a coercive barrier against realizing the legitimate rights of others. Unless, once more, it is allowed that the ethics of revolution may be about the punishment of sin, rather than about the removal of armed obstacles to liberation or justice. I assume they may not.

These individual rights constitute a limit upon consequentialist calculation.

They cannot be disregarded in favour of, traded off against a hypothesis or speculation of there being, some greater benefit derivable from such trade – even if this supposed benefit is itself computed in terms of rights. That exercise might be legitimate, were the successful issue of revolutionary struggle millennial in character, a time and condition in which all would finally be well. We are surely over, if we ever really entertained, that kind of illusion. Whatever benefits real revolutions in a just cause may bring, each one is always a particular, a limited, even if it is a very large, step forward; and is a step always into new difficulties, new problems and conflicts, unforeseen and unforeseeable consequences; into uncertainties. That is if they win. Sometimes they lose, or lose for the time being. Against this background, these features of real as opposed to **millennial** revolutions, no one's life or person may be simply discounted for what are by their nature uncertain, sometimes highly speculative, projections; no one who has not taken the path of war by aggressing on behalf of tyranny or injustice – and in that case even they retain their rights against inhumane cruelty.

The question will be raised at this juncture whether individual rights against being killed or violated are then, in every other circumstance, absolute. They are all but absolute. If this answer is deemed to be insufficiently precise, its superiority over the meaningful alternatives to it appears to me **compelling**.<sup>35</sup> One such alternative is to say that the rights are indeed absolute, inviolable everywhere save when forfeited by their holders in the manner described. The trouble with this is that it is always possible to envisage cases (one has to kill an innocent person to avert a massacre of hundreds; or to save the population of a city; etc.) for which it would be conceded by all but a few doctrinaire fanatics that the moral horror of the consequences has – tragically – to be allowed to **override** the rights of the innocent. Examples like that are much rarer in reality than they are in philosophical discussion but cannot be excluded unfortunately from the situations of extremity which compose wars and revolutions. On the other hand, we make the force of these rights too weak if we say (something like): they must be respected by and large, or must be respected except when there are important or urgent competing considerations. That would render them, for present purposes, nugatory. For, the situations we are talking about just are, **ex hypothesi**, ones full of urgency, full of competing considerations of the gravest kind. In order, therefore, to have the necessary force to constrain and limit what is done in a just revolutionary cause, the rights must be treated as all but absolute.

That is to say that they may be overridden if and only if doing so is the sole means of averting imminent and certain disaster. I repeat: the sole means; and disaster which is otherwise imminent and certain. This is a proviso of impending moral catastrophe. What it **permits** is to do a moral wrong in order to escape some very terrible consequence. But it is, then, precisely a wrong that is done. Justifiable in one perspective, it remains unjustifiable in another. 'It does not become all right.'<sup>36</sup> It is produced out of an irresoluble conflict

between two types of moral reasoning, the reckoning of consequences and respect for individual rights. Someone's rights *have* to be overridden; but *overridden* is what they have to be. It is a tragedy, an unavoidable crime. All the more reason so to specify the circumstances of exception as maximally to ensure that people's rights against violence may not be disregarded lightly. And if it is said that even the stipulation of impending catastrophe cannot eliminate difficult borderline cases and, therewith, the possible commission of avoidable under the heading of unavoidable crimes, that cannot be denied. All the same, it does put much, and quite clearly so, beyond acceptable limits: the acceptable limits of a just revolutionary struggle.

In his argument that revolution, as tendentially a form of war, cannot be limited by 'abstract norms', **Trotsky** derides 'the bourgeois pacifist who wants to "humanize" warfare by prohibiting the use of poison gases, the bombardment of unfortified cities, etc.' The argument backfires. It acquits those engaged in warfare of any responsibility for what they do by blaming the phenomenon – war – itself. It is a variant of the 'war is hell' theme and, as such, anticipates arguments of the same general form which were to be used, a few years later, by Harry Truman and his advisers to justify the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and **Nagasaki**.<sup>37</sup> It is too easy. That a revolution is likely to involve violence; that the opponents of freedom and equality, democracy or socialism, are generally ready to use massive, horrifying violence; that the struggle against them is then a war, and as a war, a realm of the most brutal necessity; none of this can legitimate a way of thinking, or at least of speaking, which would relax all moral limits by making the activity of war itself the culprit for anything that the participants in it might do. If there are indeed circumstances to make some moral crimes unavoidable, it is still necessary to have the rules and restraints which define them as crimes and which serve as a barrier against the avoidable ones. Socialists surely have good reason to be on their guard against forms of argument that are used to throw off all ethical constraints from around the conduct of war; and that were used, specifically, to justify opening the latest and potentially the most lethal chapter in the history of human warfare.

### III

Where there are established parliamentary democracies, with a set of basic civil and political rights and freedoms protected under law, there is no right of revolution on account of tyranny. There is a right of social revolution – on account of grave injustice – against the capitalist forms of power, wealth and privilege over which these democracies preside, but the thing is complicated by the claim the latter make to democratic legitimacy. For, the claim rests upon a presumption, explicit or implicit, of popular consent, and the presence of consent – even be it granted that it is less than full-blooded or universal, that it is qualified in all sorts of ways, shades into mere acquiescence or

apathy, and so on – must partially weaken the force of any judgement of grave injustice.

I carry water every day a long distance to your house and at some cost in time and energy to myself. You say, 'Thank you very much.' I do it under threat of violence and would not otherwise. The relation is exploitative. Now, on the other hand, I carry the water every day because, even though it takes time and is hard, you are a weak and aged friend and cannot do it. I do it willingly, as a favour. There is no injustice in the relation. These are deliberately simple, extreme, examples. It is possible to construct a range of intermediate ones in which the ingredients of force and consent are more mixed and are thrown together with others still: habit and custom, ideology or illusion, etc. But further examples are unnecessary to my point: that the stronger the basis for a presumption of freely given consent to some particular set of social relations, the more qualified must be the practical conclusions that can be drawn from any judgement of injustice pertaining to them. In the present case, no revolutionary attempt, especially as involving violence, is justifiable in the light only of a philosopher's – or revolutionary's, or political group's – judgement that the social order is unjust. That judgement needs to be 'proven', in a manner of speaking, by a recognition, on the part of those on the receiving end of the unjust relations, that such is indeed their character.

This amounts to saying, first, that any project of social revolution has to demonstrate its democratic credentials; and second, that if it is to contest the democratic legitimacy of those limited types of democracy that exist in some capitalist societies, it will have to offer, and then win democratic support for, an alternative form of democratic legitimacy. The road of social revolution cannot therefore simply bypass the institutions of parliamentary democracy. It either runs through them as a gateway or, being blocked in the attempt, shows in practice that they are not one, but are a fortress rather, a bastion against social revolution, just or democratic as may be; and shows the location of a genuine gateway at the same time.

We come here upon old and well-known arguments. This road, in theory and dispute, is a much beaten track. I tread it myself again now briefly, in order only to make one observation pertinent to the ethics of revolution. I am concerned, then, with two broad types of strategic viewpoint, which may be called, for short, the 'gateway' and the 'bastion' hypotheses. (I reject a more familiar terminology of 'parliamentary' versus 'extra-parliamentary' roads to socialism, for reasons to be set forth in a moment.) In either case, though, it should be emphasized, it is the ethics of socialist revolution that are under discussion: I set aside the viewpoint sometimes known as gradualism. According to this, there is no need for revolution at all because socialism can be achieved bit by bit over a very long period. At the end of the line, there will have been a radical transformation but there will have been no revolution in the sense that matters here, because of the long drawn out, the piecemeal, albeit cumulatively fundamental, nature of the process.<sup>38</sup> I set this conception

aside as irrelevant to the ethical issues involved, irrespective of whether or not it offers a feasible path to socialism; that is, even if (as I doubt) it does. For, 'can' does not imply 'ought'. If capitalist societies are gravely – integrally – unjust and a democratic basis can be won for their more or less rapid transformation, it is not then clear what moral consideration would speak in favour of preferring a process which might take two or three hundred or more years.

I now set aside, also, extreme variants of the 'gateway' and 'bastion' hypotheses. It does not matter whether or not anyone really subscribes to these in such an exaggerated form, though the opponents of each can be found who will so present or caricature the view they reject. The two extremes are, in any case, limit positions to be set aside in trying to delineate the strategic terrain in a more realistic way. Let us call them, respectively, 'pure' parliamentarism and 'pure' insurrectionism. According to the first, socialist transformation can be achieved by a political process in all essentials identical to the normal passage of parliamentary legislation. A socialist party is elected on the basis of its revolutionary programme and this is carried through into law and public policy. Its implementation is the socialist revolution. The state that sees it through remains intact. According to the second conception, by contrast, the battle for socialism takes place outside the (bourgeois) parliamentary arena and against the existing state. It is a mass, extra-parliamentary struggle, throwing up alternative democratic institutions and, with them, a situation of dual power. The victory of this new democracy over the old state, which is destroyed, is the indispensable condition of social revolution.

Now, given both the enormity of the tasks entailed in any socialist transformation of society and the extent of probable opposition to it, it is unthinkable that the project could be accomplished on pure parliamentarist lines. It would require as a complement the most intensive commitment and participation, active struggle, by very large numbers of people outside parliament; and in a sufficiently structured and organized way that there is good reason to stress the vital role of an extra-parliamentary democracy alongside the parliamentary one. However composed, moreover – of workers', consumers' and neighbourhood committees, local or regional councils, campaign bodies, minority movements, or whatever – if it is indeed socialism that is brought into being, then much of this other, participatory democracy, of the structures and the spirit of it, would have to survive the work of revolution itself, as the material of a more democratic political order. To put the same thing otherwise, even if there is some historical continuity between the parliamentary democracy at the origin of this whole process and the polity that emerges from it, this could not be exactly the same state, unchanged in its fundamental features. If not, as in the Leninist canon, 'smashed', it would have been significantly transformed.

On the other hand, the pure insurrectionist approach will be embarrassed to explain how a socialist party, or coalition of parties, or movement, which

had been capable of guiding a struggle for socialism to the point of dual power, had been able to win a democratic mandate for its revolutionary project within institutions of workers' or popular or participatory democracy lying across the territory of an entire country – how such a political formation could be incapable of winning significant representation within an existing democratic parliament. If it can begin to found a new democratic legitimacy, it **must have** some possibility of creating a space, a platform, a point of struggle for it within the old. Simply bypassing the democratic institutions that exist is not, therefore, a serious hypothesis. In addition, the insistence, under the rubric of 'smashing' the state, on a total discontinuity between bourgeois-democratic and projected socialist polities has tended to obscure for too many revolutionary socialists the value of certain norms and institutions which any real socialist democracy would need to incorporate: amongst them, a national representative assembly elected by direct universal suffrage, some separation of powers, the independence of judicial from political processes, the protection of basic individual rights, a constitutionally guaranteed political pluralism. Even if a socialist democracy can only emerge by replacing the institutions of the old state, there is reason to dwell on a line of continuity here all the same.

Thus qualified, the 'gateway' and the 'bastion' hypotheses remain different. Each now comprehends, as is necessary in the given context for any minimally serious strategic approach, both a parliamentary and an **extra-parliamentary** dimension to socialist revolution, both a continuity and a discontinuity of political forms. But they still differ, and critically, in this: the former hypothesis forbids, what the latter one countenances, a point of constitutional rupture. For, in the 'gateway' view socialist transformation must, while in the 'bastion' view it need not, derive its legitimacy from the parliamentary source.

I defend the ethical basis of the 'bastion' view. The other one says more, probably, or at least implies more, than it knows. By treating the prevailing, parliamentary legitimacy as the single acceptable origin of any projected socialist legitimacy it places allegiance to an existing state above considerations of democracy or justice. To see the point, one only has to allow here what has been much emphasized in the earlier part of this essay: the inherently, the deeply, uncertain character of all revolutionary situations. So, try to envisage the broad lines of such a situation with both its parliamentary and extra-parliamentary facets. These two democracies, let us concede, under some conditions could cohere into a more or less well-articulated assault on the positions of capitalist power and wealth; into a successful assault. But how, other than dogmatically, could it be ruled out in advance that they might not so cohere? That, for example, a particular parliamentary assembly might try to use what was left of its present term – which could be some *years* – to resist very urgent demands coming with clear, formally expressed and overwhelming support

from the extra-parliamentary democratic institutions? Or that other forces, including other forces within the state, might move, and some of them violently, to block the parliamentary gateway? One only has to allow the possibility. Must the justification, the legitimacy, of socialist revolution in the parliamentary-democratic capitalist countries, come from one specific kind of institutional link with the past? It will come, if it does come, from securing a democratic foundation for putting an end to social relations that are unjust.<sup>39</sup>

## NOTES

1. It follows Anthony Arblaster, 'What is Violence?', in Ralph Miliband & John Saville (eds.), *The Socialist Register 1975*, London 1975, pp. 227–39.
2. Michael Walzer, 'The Moral Standing of States', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 9, 1979–80, p. 215.
3. John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Civil Government*, Chapter XIX, paragraph 228. And see paragraphs 149, 199, 201, 212, 229.
4. See Barrington Moore jr, *Reflections on the Causes of Human Misery*, London 1972, pp. 25–28.
5. As this contrast may also be expressed, 'Are capitalist states capitalist because there has been no socialist revolution, or has there been no socialist revolution because they are capitalist?' I owe the formulation to Göran Therborn who used (something like) it at a colloquium some years ago. Ted Honderich, *Violence For Equality*, Harmondsworth 1980, p. 35. (Emphasis in the original – as generally here unless stated otherwise.) The sentiment vaguely echoes that of Mark Twain I have used as epigraph. Honderich has some compelling ways of focusing one's mind on the 'other' compelling order of fact. See, for example, pp. 1620, 26; and p. 141, lines 16–21. On the definitional point, see again Arblaster, 'What is Violence?', pp. 239–43.
7. I discuss and criticize the notion of prefiguration at length in *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg*, London 1976, pp. 133–173.
8. See, respectively, Kai Nielsen, 'On Justifying Revolution', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 37, 19767, pp. 527–8, and Barrington Moore jr, *Political Power and Social Theory*, New York 1962, p. 206. See also the same author's *Reflections on the Causes of Human Misery*, pp. 25–30; Mihailo Markovic, 'Violence and Human Self-Realisation', in his *The Contemporary Marx*, Nottingham 1974, p. 169; and David Miller, 'The Use and Abuse of Political Violence', *Political Studies* 32, 1984, p. 417. This might well be the sense of Herbert Marcuse, 'Ethics and Revolution', in Richard T. De George, *Ethics and Society*, London 1968, pp. 139–40, 142–6; and is the sense of Honderich's argument in *Violence For Equality*, pp. 45–51, 163–5, 182–7; albeit that Honderich, for his part, is explicit in rejecting the terminology of 'calculation' or 'computation' for one of 'comparison'.
10. The view is put forward apropos war by David Luban, 'Just War and Human Rights', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 9, 1979–80, pp. 174–6.
11. Leon Trotsky et al., *Their Morals and Ours*, New York 1966, p. 41. And cf. Marcuse, 'Ethics and Revolution'. p. 146.
12. 'The Moralists and Sycophants against Marxism', in Trotsky, *Ibid.*, p. 48 – and see his earlier *Terrorism and Communism*, Ann Arbor 1961, pp. 22, 58, for similar arguments: 'Who aims at the end cannot reject the means. . . If the socialist revolution requires a dictatorship. . . it follows that the dictatorship must be

- guaranteed at all cost'; '. . . the revolution does require of the revolutionary class that it should attain its end by all methods at its disposal.'
13. *Their Morals and Ours*, pp. 19–20, 46–7, 53; and Lenin, 'The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky', *Collected Works*, Moscow 1960–1970, Volume 28, p. 236. Cf. Barrington Moore, *Reflections*, p. 39.
  14. Arblaster tentatively offers both possibilities; in **Marcuse** the point is unclear. These arguments are from: **Marcuse**, 'Ethics and Revolution', pp. 140–1, and two as yet unpublished essays by Anthony Arblaster, 'Bread first, then morals' and 'Means and Ends in the Struggle for Socialism'. The first of the two is due to appear in David **McLellan** (ed.), *Socialism and Morality*, London 1989; it is the second that has the specific exclusions. Cf. also on this matter Kai Nielsen, 'On the Ethics of Revolution', *Radical Philosophy* 6, Winter 1973, p. 19.
  15. See Locke, *The Second Treatise of Civil Government*, Chapter XIX, paragraphs 223, 225, 230.
  16. Steven Lukes, *Marxism and Morality*, Oxford 1985, pp. xiii, 141–2, 146–8; and see Arblaster, 'Bread first, then morals', in **McLellan**, *Socialism and Morality*; and Kate **Soper**, 'Marxism and Morality', *New Left Review* 163, May/June 1987, pp. 111–3.
  17. Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, New York 1977, p. 227.
  18. **Soper**, 'Marxism and Morality', pp. 112–3.
  19. The description is from Phillip Van Niekerk, 'Ends and Nasty Means', *New Statesman*, 8 November 1985, p. 19. In general, my information is from newspaper coverage of the period. I have confined myself to using only what was widely reported.
  20. See Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (cited hereafter as Walzer), p. 21. The extent of my debt to **Walzer's** book will be plain to anyone familiar with it, as it will from the frequent reference here made to it. I should like, all the same, to acknowledge the debt more formally.
  21. Walzer, pp. 41–3; and cf. Thomas **Nagel**, 'War and Massacre', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, 1971–72, pp. 133–4.
  22. Walzer, pp. 137, 144–6; **Nagel**, 'War and Massacre', pp. 139–40. For argument about the notion of 'innocence', see further George I. Mavrodes, 'Conventions and the Morality of War', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 4, 1974–75, pp. 117–31, and Robert K. **Fullinwider**, 'War and Innocence', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 5, 1975–76, pp. 90–97.
  23. See Walzer, pp. 199–204.
  24. Amílcar Cabral, *Revolution in Guinea*, London 1969, pp. 103–5; and Basil Davidson, *The Liberation of Guiné*, Harmondsworth 1969, pp. 96, 146–7. PAIGC: the African Independence Party of **Guiné** and the Cape Verde Islands. ANC: the African National Congress. For statements of the latter, see, for instance, the interview with Oliver Tambo in *The Guardian*, 5 November 1985, and the speech of his reported in the same paper, 10 January 1986. The second of these, it has to be said, is less unambiguous than the first.
  25. Walzer, p. 198.
  26. *Their Morals and Ours*, pp. 31–2, 467.
  27. Walzer, pp. 151–9.
  28. As well as his book, there is also a shorter piece by Michael Walzer addressed to it: see 'Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2, 1972–73, pp. 160–80.
  29. **Nagel**, 'War and Massacre', pp. 140–1.
  30. See reports by David Beresford in *The Guardian*, 15 February and 29 May 1986.
  31. From, respectively, David Beresford, 'The Killing of Maki Shosana', *The Guardian*, 26 July 1985, and Allister Sparks, 'The Road to Revolution', *The Observer*,

28 July 1985.

32. Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* 1901–1941, London 1963, p. 282. The passage is also cited in Lukes, *Marxism and Morality*, p. 122.
33. Walzer, p. 135.
34. Soper, 'Marxism and Morality', p. 113.
35. I here follow, yet once more, Michael Walzer; for this and the next paragraph, see Walzer, pp. 228–32, 251–5, and *passim*; and also his 'Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands', pp. 171, 174.
36. Nagel, 'War and Massacre', p. 136–7; and cf. pp. 126, 142–3.
37. Trotsky, *Their Morals and Ours*, p. 47. Walzer, p. 265; and see also pp. 32–3.
38. See my definition of revolution at the beginning of this essay.
39. In thinking about the issues that occupy the major part of this essay I was helped by some discussions I had with friends. I thank them all, Paul Cammack, Mary Simons, Hillel Steiner, Ralph and Angela Young; as well as my closest friend, Adèle. Given the subject matter, I am more than just conventionally obliged to add here that none of the above necessarily agrees with the views I have expressed.