

ON MODERATION¹
Defending an Ancient Virtue in a
Modern World



Harry Clor

BAYLOR UNIVERSITY PRESS

© 2008 by Baylor University Press
Waco, Texas 76798

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission in writing of Baylor University Press.

Cover Design: Steve Scholl, WaterStone Agency
Book Design: Ellen Condict

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Clor, Harry M., 1929-
On moderation : defending an ancient virtue in a modern world / Harry Clor.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-60258-155-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Political science--Philosophy. 2. Political ethics. 3. Moderation--Political aspects. I. Title.

JA71.C56 2008
320.01--dc22

2008010611

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper with a minimum of 30% pcw recycled content.

Chapter 1

POLITICAL MODERATION



Balancing the Extremes

Moderation is rarely perceived as an exciting subject. Indeed, an author who is excited by the idea, as I am, might be thought a bit eccentric. Yet the concept is of far-reaching import, and an argument on its behalf encounters very interesting dilemmas and faces the risk of platitudinous solutions.

Consider how frequently the terminology of moderation is employed in our discourse about matters political, social, and personal.¹ The idea that there are “moderate,” as opposed to “extremist,” leaders, movements, policies and regimes is so pervasive that it might seem an inherent or unavoidable premise of our perception and discussion of public issues. Also pervasive is the supposition in much of this discourse that moderate and extremist are discernible realities and that the former is something desirable while the latter is not. Yet we seldom undertake to focus analytically on these judgments—to explore them systematically or consider the grounds of our assumptions about human affairs when we make them. This is unsurprising; such an inquiry is more likely to come up with questions, problems, or anomalies than any simple or clear-cut answer.²

Is there a rational basis for regarding some heads of state or movements (political, cultural, religious) as “fanatical,” while their adversaries

are not so regarded? Perhaps it is all a matter of opinion, political bias, and relativity—cultural or ideological. Extremist compared to what, you might ask, and isn't it the case that "one man's fanatic is another's freedom fighter"? Perhaps the ordinary view that the fanatic is one who acts violently in a wholly irrational manner or for uncompromisable ends amounts to nothing more than a conventional dogma or at best a salutary myth. (Yet if "one man's fanatic is another's freedom fighter" is to be taken literally as a serious proposition, it would follow that mass-murdering suicide bombers are not fanatical, except from the biased emotional perspective of those injured by them or those unappreciative of their "cause.")

This essay is an effort to grapple with the question of rational basis by examining, in serial order, several major conceptions of what political moderation means, considering as we go the vicissitudes of each, and the extent to which each one in particular and the several collectively can be justified.



In ordinary political parlance, the moderate position is usually thought of as a position located between opposite extremes. In other words, a sharp polarity is observed, and an area one deems sufficiently distant from both ends is envisioned as the "center." We find this perspective reflected in journalistic accounts and books on contemporary issues, as well as commonsense observations of the man on the street.³ This familiar and commonsensical procedure has interesting vicissitudes.

As to the uses of government and the scope of its activity, is President George W. Bush classifiable as a centrist, a middle-of-the-road political figure? Until recently at least, many regarded Bush as such—especially when contrasted, explicitly or implicitly, with a Ted Kennedy on his left and a Newt Gingrich on his right. Yet the latter two can both look moderate if compared to revolutionary socialists on the one hand and right-winged antigovernment militants on the other. Does judgment depend entirely upon what one chooses to identify as the extremes?

Franklin D. Roosevelt certainly did not pursue a course of action nicely intermediate between the liberals and conservatives of his time. His

vigorous leadership carried the nation substantially in a "liberal" direction. The New Deal has been viewed by many (friends and enemies) as having initiated a near revolution regarding the role of government in the regulation of economic enterprise, reduction of social inequalities, and introduction of welfare measures for the less affluent. But from a broader perspective, FDR's position can be seen as a moderating force—standing between grave threats from the far left and the far right; the New Deal reforms were calculated to protect our civic order, democratic capitalism, from both. Arguably, the liberal welfare state as such is susceptible of characterization as a "vital center." Which of these two perspectives (if either) is the more valid or appropriate one?

We could make the case that the latter is of the more historic importance. But then judgment is made to depend ultimately upon what one regards as the fundamental issues.⁴

The problem of definition is further complicated where political movements are motivated by religion. Early in the war in Afghanistan, we heard a proposition that "moderate Taliban" might be acceptable in a reconstituted regime. Spokespersons for the embattled opposition replied in effect that this is a blatant oxymoron; Taliban are necessarily extremists. Not too long ago some Saudi Arabian leaders expressed the hope that a trend toward moderation would gradually come to prevail in that country's Islam. What could they (supposedly Wahabi Muslims or their supporters) mean by religious moderation? And how is the concept at all applicable to religion or religiously inspired movements?

Hence critics have various opportunities to argue that "moderate" and "extremist" are phenomena wholly subjective and situation-bound, utterly dependent upon variable opinions or commitments, circumstances and partisan perceptions of circumstances (ephemera like the shifting shadows in Plato's cave). So what sense does it make to take the concept seriously as applying to things real and important? At this stage of the inquiry, perhaps the most one can say affirmatively is that pragmatically situational judgment calls may be defensible in view of our particular concerns here and now. (For example, some of Bush's policies can be seen as occupying periodically a kind of middle ground regarding domestic matters at issue these days, and right now the term centrist is applied to Ariel Sharon's policy concerning a Palestinian state.) But this

is unsatisfying; those of us unsatisfied with it must search for a reasonable way to think of the subject trans-situationally, that is, in terms of *attitudes* and *outlooks* having more enduring import. And we are obliged to consider more systematically why it makes sense to evaluate political moderation positively, as something beneficial. The negative evaluation may be summarized as follows:

Moderate can only mean a disposition to tepid, middling compromise between opposing ideals. Moderation is a weakness, a timid unwillingness to take a clear and decisive stand, a mere utilitarian "splitting of the difference." It is the opposite of what matters and is admirable—principled and wholehearted commitments. It is mediocrity at variance with greatness, which entails passionate devotion to a cause, therefore an inevitable one-sidedness.

A reply can be made that moderation is not simply a matter of being in the middle of whatever (perceived) extremes happen to be around. The moderate politician builds consensus and unifies; he or she seeks agreement across partisan lines and speaks to the people in a nonconfrontational, noninflammatory way intended to be unifying. This perspective gets us a bit beyond a mere splitting-of-the-difference. But consensus is often unenduring; there is a distinction to be made between an ephemeral and a deep-seated, long-term consensus. Nor is a widely shared opinion always the most desirable outcome; we can envision such a thing as a widely shared opinion that is unjust, even "extremist." And speaking softly and soothingly is not at all times what is indicated; spirited rhetoric can be essential for effective leadership (e.g., FDR's "rendezvous with destiny"). And confrontational pronouncements might be the thing most needed (e.g., Theodore Roosevelt against "malefactors of great wealth," Churchill against the Nazis and their appeasers, and, for that matter, Bush on the "war on terrorism").

It would seem that moderation is noninflammatory and harmonizing only sometimes—or, alternatively, that it is praiseworthy only sometimes. Paradoxically, perhaps, if we are to get beyond loose generalities of this sort, we need to gain some intellectual distance from particulars familiar to us, yet ambiguously many-sided. The inquiry should move for a time to higher theoretical levels—and hence to identification of the recurrent political questions and problems on account of which moderation is of perennial importance.



Once while teaching a course on the American Founding I thought it appropriate to stress the virtues of political moderation. An outstanding student (and congenital debunker) responded with a challenge: "So you would have been against the American Revolution or you would have looked for some compromise to avoid it!" At the time the question threw me embarrassingly off balance.

An article by the late Martin Diamond comes partly to the rescue; the article is entitled "The Revolution of Sober Expectations."⁵ The idea is that, in contrast to other revolutions—the French and Bolshevik ones, for example—the American Revolution was tempered by relatively limited aims or aspirations that are inconducive to terror and tyranny. This contrast is illustrative, and worthy of reflection with a view to my project here.

The Declaration of Independence did not declare, as the Communist Manifesto did, that its "ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions."⁶ Communist revolution must demand the forcible overthrow of the entire social order because of its all-encompassing ends: the total abolition of private property and thus economic conflict, the transformation of social relations motivated by private advantage, and the eventual creation of a wholly different, unselfishly communal type of person (the "New Man").⁷ Prior to that outcome the radical revolutionary is filled with righteous rage at the world's abominable deficiencies, and he is tempted to use massive violence to replace the reign of abomination with the reign of brotherhood, equality, and justice.

The Declaration of Independence contemplated the use of lethal force, but it did so upon no such grandiose expectations for totalistic change in human relations and personality. Force is to be used, as necessary, for the sake of government by the consent of the governed and certain "inalienable" individual rights which (in their Lockean derivation) are reflections of elementary human interests. Of course, these principles are important, and their institutionalization necessarily entails significant social changes; however, they neither presuppose nor require the wholesale reconstruction of our motivations and relations so as to achieve the vision of a thoroughly communalized world. More precisely, the work

of the American Founders leaves private property intact, along with the self-seeking inclinations associated with property and pursuit of material prosperity. The philosophy of the Founding does not aspire to root out the ultimate causes of economic and social conflict or all the inequities, even vices, that arise from factional ambitions. Rather, as is well known, the worst outcomes are to be prevented by the mutual checking and balancing of such interests and ambitions. The ultimate causes are thought to be "sown in the nature of man" and beyond reach, short of despotic means. These aspects of the American polity can serve to supply us with one model of political moderation.⁸

A number of inferences might be drawn from the antithesis between this model and communism. The one I want to draw is that moderation can be seen as a realistic limitation of aspiration as to what can be accomplished politically, even at the highest level of constitution-making. Moderation is a recognition of limits, the adversary of what we may call "transformationalism" or "maximalism." It views as dangerously utopian, and conducive to virulent strife, any grand scheme to impose on actual human beings (as distinguished from the characters in literary or theoretical utopias) a social order flawlessly just or morally pure. The moderate political leader or citizen might be a reformer, but the reforms will be tempered with cognizance that, on account of human frailties, the possibilities for benign innovation are far from boundless. This outlook cultivates a willingness to put up with some defects in institutions—even some evils in government and society—on the premise that they cannot be eradicated, or from the perception that a thoroughgoing effort to eradicate them threatens to unleash greater vices and evils. Political moderation is informed by a cautionary skepticism (articulated or unarticulated) about our prospects for institutionalizing, or otherwise causing to be socially predominant, our ideal visions of the good life. It serves then to counteract the rage to which maximalists are given when ideals are unrealized.

You might want to say that this is a standing invitation to complacency and that the bounds of realistic aspiration are variable; they are different in different times and places. Is the perception of limits that seems to characterize moderation nothing more than commonly accepted perceptions of existing conditions which only appear to be stubborn facts

of life? (Perhaps the American Founders mistook the commercialism and factionalism of their times for such stubborn facts.) Proponents of political moderation must acknowledge that awareness of and accommodation to longstanding historical or habitual constraints is a large part of what it is about, as adamant refusal to recognize such constraints is a certain kind of "extremism." But often underlying such an acknowledgment one can discern a claim that there are limitations, ultimate and permanent, arising from the human condition—the kind of beings that we are naturally. Prominent among these is the pervasively observable fact that most of us most of the time are self-interested beings with basic desires to stay alive, maintain material well-being, and experience more pleasure than pain. Also prominent is a propensity to exercise power when occasions allow,⁹ and the associated disposition to pride or vanity by which, among other things, one seeks to beautify these inclinations with moral rationalizations or humanitarian pretenses. (Apparently we are the only animals who can deceive ourselves.) To be sure, these are not the only aspects of man's nature that are relevant to our subject. But the denial of them and conviction that human beings are wholly malleable is a standing invitation to political maximalism. Insofar as these are pervasive human inclinations, they constitute, collectively, one of the major reasons that there are no flawless solutions—even moderate ones—to our social problems.



Here is a third concept of political moderation closely associated to the one just considered but giving rise to some different questions. It remains to be seen how far this concept is dependent on the same view of human nature as its predecessor. In definition of true statesmanship, Edmund Burke writes, "We compensate, we reconcile, we balance. We are able to unite into one consistent whole the various anomalies and contending principles that are found in the minds and affairs of men."¹⁰ The root idea here is that there are always diverse and competing desiderata in political life, and that this reality determines the fundamental task of statesmanship, that of balancing and reconciling. This is not simply a recognition of persistent conflict (Marxists do that, and so do fascists and radical

Islamists). Nor is it only factional "interests" in the Madisonian sense that are in contention. The point is that, in many cases, each of the opposing demands you have to deal with reflects a *principle* deserving of your consideration as an aspect of the public good. Immoderation is characterized by a one-sided or absolute commitment to a good that is in fact only one good among several. (Burke accused the French Revolutionaries of maximizing populist equality at the expense of civic order, property, and morality or decency.) The balancing enterprise characterizing moderate statesmanship necessarily encounters "anomalies" because you are fighting on behalf of standards of value that may be in contradiction. Accordingly, while this statesmanship is not identifiable simply with resolute devotion to a cause, it is surely distinguishable from an unprincipled avoidance of commitment. Its real practitioner cannot be someone intellectually or morally mediocre; it requires certain virtues of mind and character—the wisdom, the seriousness, and the courage to come to grips with intricacies or ambiguities, ethical as well as tactical, concerning matters of far-reaching import.

Looked at from this viewpoint, moderation in politics has something in common with thoughtful scholarship, which has to take disinterested account of opposing perspectives on a complex question. In the former case, however, action is required, and here our viewpoint encounters one of the more interesting objections to it. A leader—for that matter, anyone—who is too keenly aware of the weighty considerations "on all sides of the question" will find it difficult to take a definite position and maintain it vigorously. Perhaps there is such a thing as too much open-mindedness (or too much of what some contemporary liberals call "value pluralism"). Excessive cognizance of competing claims may lead to a relativistic outlook that paralyzes action or induces drift to an unprincipled middle. As Montaigne remarks, "You get lost considering so many contrary aspects and diverse shapes."¹¹ As Hamlet, that famous intellectual waverer, puts it, you can become "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." The danger is familiar to many intelligent people, including those involved in the enterprise of liberal education, where students and educators are compelled to confront contrasting doctrines presented by thoughtful proponents. Perhaps intellectual paralysis is, for a time, a good thing in education, but political paralysis, where there are great

causes at stake, is not. Should we say, with Nietzsche, that wholehearted belief is the prime condition of resolute action, and that the condition of wholehearted belief is that you live under a kind of "veil" that screens out much of the world's moral diversity?¹² This line of argument is bad news for the concept of moderation, yet history furnishes some impressive counterexamples testifying for the proposition that political moderation is compatible with action both principled and resolute.

As a model, the conduct and character of Abraham Lincoln come quickly to mind. In his debates with Stephen Douglas and his presidential campaign of 1860, Lincoln stood on a platform of "no extension of slavery" whatever into the Territories. He did not propose to abolish slavery at that time in the states where it already existed. The position is two-pronged: the policy of "no extension" reaffirmed the principle that slavery is a wrong (the Declaration of Independence being right), and the compromise with it in the existing southern states was thought necessary to save the Union from dissolution.¹³ Lincoln can thus be seen as occupying a middle ground between abolitionists and supporters of the southern cause. Now Stephen Douglas may also be seen as occupying a middle ground; his policy of allowing local majorities in the Territories to decide the controversy for themselves was offered as a Union-saving measure (by taking the inflammatory issue out of national controversy), and he apparently thought that this local "popular sovereignty" would eventually lead to the demise of slavery nationally. Do we have to conclude that both Lincoln and Douglas were the moderate statesmen on this great controversy? To an extent I think we do, but Lincoln has the greater claim to that title. More clearly than Douglas, Lincoln squarely confronted and wrestled with the two crucial imperatives: fundamental human equality and preservation of the republican Union. As to the former, Lincoln adamantly rejected all compromises with the principle of "no extension"; he would not tolerate even seemingly small concessions on the issue of extension.¹⁴ And he conducted the politics of the war with a view to eventual emancipation and eventual reunion. One can hardly regard as unexciting utilitarian mediocrity Lincoln's relentless efforts to balance and fulfill these two vital imperatives of his time; consider the intense pressure to which he was subjected by righteous opinion from all sides. That in this endeavor he had to make agonizingly difficult, even

ethically distasteful, choices and compromises seems only to highlight the impressiveness of Lincoln's characteristic fortitude and self-control. (It would seem the easier, less demanding course to take a categorically abolitionist position like that of Emerson and Thoreau, especially when one has no political responsibility for the consequences.) The problem of resolute action in the face of competing principles can hardly be resolved by one historical illustration, but the case of Lincoln does serve to exemplify this frequently unrecognized truth: moderation and greatness are not opposites.¹⁵

Let us return to our more-or-less Burkean definition, which associates political moderation with a deep awareness of the plurality of goods and ends (the source of extremism being ignorance or denial of this reality). This plurality is another major reason that there are no flawless political solutions. The conclusion seems unavoidable that where there is an effort to "balance" disparate demands, the resulting arrangement will have to satisfy some at the expense of the others, or it will be a compromise such that all are accommodated partially but none fully. There is no serious balancing without compromise and no compromise without cost, without the sacrifice of something. To state the point a bit differently, in the philosophy underlying political moderation we find the idea that there are antinomies in human affairs and that therefore "you cannot have it all," not ever. One of the most fundamental antinomies I can think of is this: A society seeking to maximize the communitarian side of life, and the thoroughgoing public spiritedness necessary to it (like the old Israeli kibbutz), does so with considerable sacrifice of individual autonomy and the private side of life.¹⁶ On the other hand, a society emphasizing the independence of the individual and encouraging commercial competition (as ours tends to do) cannot normally enjoy strong bonds of national solidarity or expect to have many citizens who care about public affairs as much as they do about private ones. And if you try to institutionalize both of these desiderata you will be unable to satisfy all that is demanded by each. Extremists, communitarian or libertarian, do not know this sort of dilemma or are unbothered by it.¹⁷

Larger theoretical questions arise. On what basis or premises, after all, do we determine the most vital goods or principles, the ones whose contention imperatively demands the balancing art of statesmanship?

And can one simply settle for plurality? These theoretical concerns should be visited.

I do not see how one could simply settle for plurality—any plurality. (An aggregate of fiercely terrorist groups with different particular objectives, perhaps ethnically derived, might find a leader who can compromise their differences sufficiently so they may terrorize together. Is he therefore a moderate?) If moderation is a rational enterprise, its practitioner must have recourse to an understanding of the desirable or worthy which transcends the particular demands he or she faces, in order to determine which, of them, if any, are the essential ones. From what source is such an understanding derivable? For Burke, who denigrates political theory as an invitation to extremism, it is derivable from practical wisdom or prudence about circumstances bearing on the well-being of the country. But this approach implies that even prudence is in need of some vision of a unified good which is more than an aggregate of the contending desiderata (especially if these are to be "united into a consistent whole"). Are we then to identify political moderation, ultimately, with a firm grasp of the common good or public interest of one's particular polity?

Of course, this conclusion presupposes that there is such a thing as the public or national interest, that "what is good for the country" is in some sense an objective or discernable reality. Ultrapluralists and "multiculturalists" would debunk all this as mythology or as matters simply of subjective and diverse opinion. How can there be a common good for a people when they disagree about it and when interests are divergent? Diversity of opinion on the slavery question existed in abundance, yet Lincoln persistently affirmed a national interest on the subject; moreover, a heavy burden of proof rests upon anyone who would debunk Lincoln's view that disunion and abandonment of "government of people, by the people and for the people" and surrender to the proposition that a class of persons is subhuman would amount to real disaster for America. Lincoln thought so on the premise that these principles serve to define us as a country. He also regarded, along with the Founding Fathers, economic prosperity and the opportunity of all to pursue it as essential elements of the country's well-being. But are these things good for America only because it was founded with a view to them—that is, only because of our peculiar history? The problem of diversity and unity among our national

interests might be resolved abstractly this way: government by consent of citizens free, equal, and prosperous is what America is unified about. The question remains, however, whether even a valid understanding of one's particular polity is sufficient, or whether by itself it can provide us with an adequate horizon for thinking about what political moderation means.

The most comprehensive point I am obliged to maintain here is two-fold: that certain conflicts of principle and purpose are characteristic of political life *per se*, and that our thinking about their resolution has to be guided, to a significant degree, by insight about human affairs *per se*. Are there insights about human affairs as such that are both true and conducive to moderation?

One contemporary liberal philosophy, if valid, could supply the answer. This view, often going by the name of "value pluralism," is that the world we live in (not just the country or culture) presents us with a variety of conflicting goods, values, or ultimate ends that are incommensurable and cannot be ranked in importance by appeal to any standard of the good life transcending them. This conflict is irresolvable; therefore, you have to choose some ultimate ends at the expense of others, and different societies will make different choices. So far the proposition lends itself to these examples: some societies will opt for strong communal bonds over individuality, public over private loyalties, national security over liberty (like contemporary Singapore), or even theocracy over secularism. And who can criticize them for these choices? But such choices are generally disfavored by liberal pluralists. What they end up favoring is a society devoted to accommodating as many of these diverse values and ways of life as possible.

Isaiah Berlin, considered a founding father of this viewpoint, observes, "Pluralism, with the measure of negative liberty [freedom from coercion] that it entails, seems to be the truer and more humane ideal . . . because it does at least recognize that human goals are many, not all of them commensurable."¹⁸ In a subsequent work, Berlin calls this pluralism "equilibrium." He concludes, "perhaps the best that one can do is try to promote some kind of equilibrium, necessarily unstable, between the different aspirations of different groups of human beings . . . to pre-

vent people from doing each other too much harm, giving each human group sufficient room to realize its own idiosyncratic, unique, particular ends without too much interference with the ends of others."¹⁹ This idea weighs in on the side of political moderation. The society envisioned is far preferable to one in which opposing groups—ethnic, religious, or ideological—exterminate each other in struggles for exclusive control of the state. But what does this polity as such stand for? In brief it stands for the avoidance of grievous "harm" and for toleration of ethical diversity. William Galston, an elaborator of Berlin's perspective, summarizes the problem as follows: "Suffice it to say that if moral pluralism is the most nearly adequate depiction of the moral universe we inhabit, then the range of choiceworthy human lives is very wide. While some ways of life can be ruled out as violating minimal standards of humanity, most cannot. If so, then the zone of human agency protected by the norm of expressive liberty is capacious indeed."²⁰ Galston's "expressive liberty" means an entitlement to live as you please. Since under this entitlement individuals and groups will please to live very differently, it must follow that tolerance is an underlying—if not *the* underlying—social norm, overriding much else.

Tolerance is not a solution to all problems, as Berlin and Galston seem to recognize when they hedge their affirmations with various qualifications and provisos. Berlin is right to characterize his equilibrium as "unstable." The instability, I think, arises largely from its insufficient provision for civic unity and for a unifying public morality (considerations that are, by the way, prominent on Edmund Burke's list of social necessities). After all, value pluralism is not simply an argument on behalf of our conventional liberal accommodation of diverse ethnicities and religions; it extols moral diversity. On the face of it, value pluralists are offering as a model of the most desirable society the one encompassing disparate ethical standards to the greatest extent possible. This dispensation would impose stringent demands indeed upon the human capacity for toleration. Is it not evident that sharp disagreements on values deemed fundamental to a worthy human life impose much strain on the virtue of tolerance? Of course, toleration is a virtue (of which moderation is in need often enough), and its scope can be fairly extensive

—where underlying it is a widespread consensus on some ethical fundamentals.²¹ In other words, tolerance by itself does not produce the sense of community upon which it depends. Some contemporary pluralists seem unaware of this problem; others grapple with it periodically, though rather ambiguously. Where attention is given to requisites of civic attachment or identity, much greater attention is given to the importance of plurality. The attempt is made to preclude ways of life deemed very harmful, though it is not often clear what is encompassed by their concept of “harm.” Norms can be maintained against ways of life violating “minimal standards of humanity,” such as, say, the practice of human sacrifice, but what about polygamy, sadistic pornography, extremely violent or degrading entertainments, a “drug culture,” and the like? And what about public education concerned with promotion of common standards of value, including patriotism? Our value pluralists are generally elusive about such questions, but the main thrust of their doctrine strongly suggests that support for communal bonds would be sparse and the common ethos rather thin.²²

Beyond these considerations is a philosophic issue raised by the claim that the conflicting goods, or cherished forms of life, in “the moral universe we inhabit” are wholly incommensurable and unrankable. I can accept this far-reaching proposition in part. To distinguish their position from outright relativism, these pluralists maintain (in addition to their acknowledgment of elementary “humanity”) that some of the contending goods they have in mind are really good. For example, a life devoted to family and one devoted to country are both humanly worthy lives, though when these commitments are in contention, the contention is irresolvable either by a cost-benefit analysis of utilities or by appeal to some universal standard of right. I agree about the utilitarian cost-benefit analysis; these commitments are not commensurable in the sense that they could be reduced to measurable quantities of the desirable. Neither could the controversy be rationally determined by direct application of a universal principle which would say “Always choose this alternative”; one has to consider the circumstances. But why are we entitled to call both of these lives good ones if there is no recourse to an understanding of human well-being or worthiness as such? What makes them good? Perhaps when we so regard them we have in mind their contribution to

the flourishing of a rational and social animal. If so, then this and other antinomies, while not resolvable in any absolute way, are amenable to illumination by reflection on the human condition; that they are antinomies is not the last word to be said about them.

Value pluralism does come down on the side of political moderation but without allowing for sufficiently penetrating consideration of what that requires and what makes it good. This liberal outlook cannot constitute the last word on our subject.



When I search for words synonymous with moderation, the term “proportionality” comes readily to mind. A sense of proportion is appropriate at all levels of politics, but especially so at the highest levels. In *Federalist* #37 James Madison noted that a major difficulty encountered by the Constitutional Convention “must have lain in combining the requisite stability and energy in government with the inviolable attention due to liberty and the republican form.”²³ The analysis goes on to discuss “the difficulty of mingling them together in due proportions.” As the Founders’ approach to resolution of this problem is widely known, I will only say this much about it here: The democratic principle of popular sovereignty, if pushed considerably, would require that all significant public offices be elective and that the elections be quite frequent so that agencies of government are maximally responsive to popular inclinations. But this would entail such frequent change of officeholders and such subjection of them to transient opinions as would be incompatible with decisive government and continuity in public policy. The Constitution addressed this dilemma by arranging that the democratic principle should be operative in differing degrees in the several branches of the federal government; the Senate, presidency, and federal courts were distanced in varying degrees from current popular opinions or passions, while the House of Representatives (expected to be powerful) was not distanced. Thus we have a constituted representative democracy, as distinguished from radical populist democracy.

I have three additional inferences to draw. This arrangement, subject to alterations the Constitution allows, has worked rather well. The

antinomy the Constitution-makers encountered is not intractable; it is amenable to alleviations, which, while complex and imperfect, are at the least acceptable. Second, the dilemma here is fundamental; the framers did not think of the disparate considerations they wrestled with simply as two "values" in a pluralistic mix of many goods. The demands of effective government and the demands of political liberty must be reconciled before other goods can be secured. The concern with establishing effective institutions of representative government is prior to concerns we may have about value pluralism or lifestyle diversity. Third, the Founders did not think of the two imperatives as American imperatives only, or of the needed proportion between them as an American interest only. After all, as Constitution-makers, their decisions were no mere reflections of an existing social order; they were in a position to shape that order and in doing so appeal to principles or premises of more universal import. Among these is the premise of the Declaration of Independence that certain natural rights belong to "all men" equally.

The doctrine of natural rights is subject to philosophic dispute or skepticism, and the skeptic would hardly accept that doctrine's premises as *the* transnational horizon for thinking about political proportionality. And it need not be. Edmund Burke was no proponent of the theory of natural rights, or of natural equality, yet as to the character of the principles and purposes whose controversy mandates high statesmanship, Burke's insight is remarkably similar to the Madisonian one.

To make a government requires no great prudence. Settle the seat of power; teach obedience and the work is done. To give freedom is itself more easy. It is not necessary to guide; it only requires to let go the rein. But to form a *free government*, that is to temper together those opposite elements of liberty and restraint in one consistent work, requires much thought, deep reflection, a sagacious, powerful and combining mind.²⁴

Obviously "free" and "government" are identified here as the opposing desiderata most imperatively requiring combination. Indeed, it is strongly suggested that liberty and restraint are the fundamental imperatives of all (not just British) civic life, and that is why their reconciliation is the task at the core of a politics deserving to be called statesman-

ship. Despite his oft-repeated distaste for theoretical speculations about universals, Burke's thought does yield a proposition of comprehensive import. Against the enthusiastic libertarianism of the French Revolution, he held that restraint upon our passions is as much of a human need as liberty or freedom of choice. Insofar as Burke has an overall conception of the good, it is this: "a moral, regulated liberty" is what is good both for a country and a person.²⁵

This is a significant claim, but it is a generality needing to be qualified by the renowned Burkean emphasis upon the centrality of prudential judgment about circumstances. The critical proportion—how much liberty and what kinds of restraints?—cannot be settled upon any abstract or universal principle. The appropriate proportion, depending upon practical wisdom, would be somewhat different for England, France, and America (and, to update, Turkey and Afghanistan, which have intense ethnic and religious antagonisms to address).



The cautionary insight just noted concerning the limitations of theory or abstract principle deserves to be counted among the components of political moderation. Aristotle, also a philosopher of moderation, stresses the importance of the prudential almost as much as Burke does. Aristotle introduces his inquiry about ethical and political norms with a methodological warning as to what we may reasonably expect from any such inquiry. "Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject matter admits of, for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions. . . . Now fine and just actions, which political science investigates, admit of much variety and fluctuation of opinion."²⁶ The central idea is that exact and universal truths are not to be expected concerning this "subject matter"—moral and political well-being—because of the great variability of the circumstances in view of which judgments of the just and the unjust, the good and the bad, have to be made. A course of action, policy, or pronouncement that is valid in some or most cases would be wrong, even disastrous, in certain situations, and there will be exceptions to any proposition you could affirm. Aristotle does not conclude that there is no truth to be had in this area but rather that

assertions must be formulated "roughly and in outline," and the best of them are "only for the most part true."²⁷

These following illustrations of the point come to mind: Ethical doctrine cannot provide absolute proscription against lying and killing, because in some situations deception or war will be the preferable option or the lesser of evils. And political science cannot affirm that, always and everywhere, "power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely" (Lord Acton's oft-repeated aphorism). Sometimes power ennobles, and nearly absolute power did not corrupt a Pericles or a Lincoln. One may say, consistently with common sense, that Lord Acton's proposition is for the most part true; power often corrupts and absolute power is very dangerous (if occasionally necessary). The warning against abstract universalization applies at all levels of abstraction, even where generalization is confined to time and place. You might be able to conclude that liberal democracy is the best regime available for contemporary nation-states, but you cannot reasonably conclude that it is best for all of them right now; some nations would be lucky to be ruled by a constitutional monarchy or respectable aristocracy.

The Aristotelian outlook sends two different messages about knowledge and judgment. You can hope to acquire a certain form of knowledge about human affairs generally, based upon experience coherently reflected upon, and defensible ethical judgments can be made. But don't try to turn the study of politics into an exact science, and don't try to turn ethics into a body of categorical imperatives. In the kind of world that these messages presuppose, political moderation is most at home.

In that world, broad principles and ideas can provide guidance for our thinking about what ought to be done but do not by themselves provide any conclusive answers. This consideration needs repeated emphasis, because of a persistent temptation to seek solutions of a political problem by direct imposition of an abstract principle with insufficient attention (in the worse cases, no attention) to the situation's peculiarities. This inclination is sometimes lauded as "idealism," though it might be as much attributable to moral pretense; at any rate, it is usually associated with an erroneously uncomplicated view of the issues and hence the moral alternatives. When obstinately indulged, it gives rise to an excessively doctrinaire or ideological politics rendering compromise and pru-

dential statesmanship virtually impossible. (Consider the abortion issue in the United States, which inadequate leadership has allowed to become a fierce battleground between sharply opposing ideologies that are irreconcilable because each asserts a categorical "right.") Moderation includes an injunction against moralism.

This is an appropriate place to note explicitly that when circumstances change significantly the moderate politician may have to change a policy he has strongly affirmed, thereby running the risk of looking unprincipled. On the other hand he or she might face the charge of extremism when it is necessary to oppose an entrenched political dogma with what might appear to be a contrary extreme (Franklin Roosevelt's case, perhaps). We should test such cases by looking to the statesman's end or purpose; is it concerned with maintaining the balances of the polity?²⁸

How do abstract ideas about human life per se appropriately bear upon practical decisions? They cannot do so directly; as previously suggested, their direct application risks dogmatism or worse. They may do so by providing ultimate premises, or intellectual and ethical horizons, within which our thinking about the larger practical issues can be oriented. (The smaller ones are still further from the reach of theory.)

Aristotle's *Ethics* provides us with one thoughtful model of the relations between theory and practice. According to that model, significant observations can be made in general "outline" about the moral life: Ethics is primarily about character (not primarily about binding moral rules). Virtuous character is a set of habitual dispositions to think, feel, and choose in accordance with a mean between opposite extremes, one being an excess and the other a deficiency. In other words, as to passions and actions concerning our well-being, there is always a too-much and a too-little, and ethical reflection can give us a rough general account of these extremities that are to be avoided. Now the proper mean, as Aristotle emphasizes, is always "relative to us" and yet it is amenable to rational consideration. The "relativity" to which Aristotle refers is not a relativity of subjective opinion but of the various situations we confront. So the virtuous course of action cannot be the same thing in all situations, though practical wisdom can provide guidance by illuminating the situation.²⁹

The overview that reflection can offer us is best illustrated here by reference to two Aristotelian virtues that are of prominent political importance: courage and good temper. Courage is about our inclinations to fear and confidence in the face of danger. As to fear, the excess of it is what we call cowardice and the deficiency recklessness. The courageous person is not the one who is utterly fearless; there are in the world things to fear. At the time of the Cuban missile crisis, you wouldn't have wanted President Kennedy and his advisors to be recklessly unafraid any more than you would want them to be overwhelmed by fear. The intermediate state of character called courage allows, as the extremities do not, some room for the exercise of sober judgment.

Good temper is a habitual disposition to regulate the natural passion of anger. Unmodified anger or indignation tends to undermine judgment and, in its extremities, gives rise to cruelty and deadly hostilities. (The leading characters in Homer's *Iliad* are driven by rage; so are today's terrorists.) Yet the opposite extreme—no feelings of anger or inability to express them—is an ethical deficiency, for there are things one ought to be angry about (grave injustices, for example). As Aristotle puts it: "For those who are not angry at the things they should be angry at are thought to be fools . . . and unlikely to defend [themselves]."³⁰ It is easy to see why this subject is of great political import. Political issues, especially large ones, are typically attended and fueled by indignation, more or less ("That's wrong!"), sometimes justified and sometimes not. Aristotle is not one of those who think that because anger or indignation gives us so many problems, it is wisest or healthiest to get rid of it. Like other passions, it has a function to perform in human affairs. Anger, like many of our passions that are the natural raw material of life (pity, sensual desire, pride), is not to be eradicated or simply suppressed but rather controlled and moderated by a habitual self-discipline.³¹

We can plausibly say that every Aristotelian virtue is a form of moderation and is in the service of self-control. Alternative to this comprehensive view of what moderation means is the view famously presented in Plato's *Republic* where it appears among the four cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice. This formulation involves a juxtaposition of moderation and courage and invites consideration of possible tension between them. Both of these approaches to the delineation of our

subject—the broader or more comprehensive approach and the narrower or more limited mode of definition—find expression in ordinary public discourse, as well as in scholarly literature, and each has its advantages. For purposes of this book I tend to follow the broader model, but do not find it fruitful to adhere to that model with utmost consistency. In some contexts it is necessary to acknowledge virtues or qualities that no definition of moderation can sufficiently account for or encompass (decisiveness in political exigencies, for example). In other words, moderation is of pervasive importance and value in public affairs, but it is not everything. My focus on its pervasive import, with occasional acknowledgment of its limits, is, I believe, in accordance at least with the spirit of Aristotelian moral philosophy.

Aristotelian thought presents us with a kind of "situation ethics," but it is a situation ethics associated with a broad view of human problems and well-being as such. The Aristotelian outlook may be regarded as avoiding two opposite errors in moral philosophizing: dogmatism or absolutism on the one hand and relativism or radical skepticism on the other. This outlook need not be the only model hospitable to the concept of moderation, but it is perhaps the most hospitable. Its supposition is, I believe, that we human beings are sufficiently alike to allow for some comprehensive insights about the welfare of our species, and hence about moderation, but we are far from such uniformity as would permit exact certitudes. The substantial yet flexible ideas of this perspective help us to grapple in a deliberative way with the perennial dilemma of unity and diversity.³² What is needed is a certain kind of theory which, aware of its limitations, allows us much latitude for pragmatic judgment and intuition.



When we are thinking of the individual, including the statesman, moderation is seen as inextricably associated with self-control. The concept of moderation presupposes both the necessity and the possibility of a kind of self-mastery, and this view depends upon an understanding of the human nature we have in common. But as Plato noted, there is a perplexity here. What is controlling what? That the "I" which masters and the "I"

which is mastered are one and the same is an unintelligible proposition. It must be that some part of me is in control of some other part. The self is divided.

We are, as the old and unrefuted definition has it, rational animals, the former term connoting possession of speech and self-consciousness, therefore the capacity for thought extending well beyond the momentary. But we are also full of imperious passions, some benign and some antisocial, even bestial,³³ which can overwhelm reason and even turn it into their instrument. Then one can become insatiable or fanatical. Self-control means that I am in a position to prevent this from happening, that the thinking part of me retains some degree of authority over the desires or emotions.

This fundamental division in the soul or psyche is at the root of our need for moderation. Keep in mind that the coalition of these disparate elements of our nature is hardly a spontaneous occurrence; it is always a project facing obstacles of some magnitude. Here arises another apparent anomaly regarding self-control: this capacity is almost never achievable on one's own. Its development requires a combination of habituation and enlightenment that is very unlikely to occur without social mandates and institutional norms. We do not become self-disciplined persons without considerable nurture, guidance, and constraints provided by the community or communities in which we live. Elsewhere I have called such communal constraints and institutional norms "public morality."³⁴ The idea that a public morality is needed would seem a truism, but, when spelled out, it encounters much opposition in liberal modernity. One often encounters the opinion that morality is a private matter. My argument is that the development of character is a matter of vital public as well as private interest. A libertarian might accept this point but insist that desirable ethical norms need no support from public authority; they are sufficiently promoted by "argument, advice and exhortation,"³⁵ that is, by rational persuasion. It is a pervasively observable fact, however, that the passions do not often follow the dictates of reasoned deliberation alone and unaided by communal standards. We are, to be sure, social beings, but our sociality is in need of much deliberate cultivation.

To elaborate, the perception that we are, at least by classical definition, rational and social beings periodically gives rise to an unduly

sanguine vision of the human condition. There is an outlook we may refer to as "rationalism" which supposes that cognitive enlightenment alone, liberated from tradition, religion, and civic bonds, is a power sufficient for the resolution of society's troubles. This outlook is utopian and unsafe. The nonutopian truth is that, for most of us, reason by itself is a rather frail instrument in need of nurture and support from agencies not exactly rational. These include a loving family, a respectable moral or civic tradition (even in the deliberations of the Supreme Court, "precedent" has some authority), and emotionally inspiring rhetoric, symbols, or images ("a picture is worth a thousand words"). In political life the pervasiveness of inspirational rhetoric—even on behalf of the most defensible principles—is testimony to the fact that reason can rarely govern alone.

A similar observation may be made about our natural sociality. It is sanguine complacency to believe that people are by nature social beings in the sense that altruistic impulses can normally be relied upon to outweigh self-centered ones; they cannot. We are such beings in our profound need for social relations; the "I" is deeply in need of a "we." (My cat has no such requirement; neither has it, strictly speaking, a "self.") The human inclination toward union with others is susceptible to, and indeed requires, cultivation by communal norms of various sorts, including some constraints upon the self.

This line of the argument tells half the story. The other half, more easily told and heard in our liberal milieu, has to do with freedom of choice and expression. The ability to make conscious or deliberate personal choices, and the exercise of free will associated therewith, is an essential element of what it means to be a rational agent and to enjoy the dignity thereof. As prominent modern thinkers further maintain, the act of choosing is a crucial energizer of one's higher faculties as well as one's individuality or uniqueness. Where this capacity is suppressed (by an oppressive regime or pervasive social conformity) human faculties are underutilized, hence underdeveloped, and the soul is enervated.³⁶ From this perspective personal liberty or self-determination becomes the pre-eminent concern, and any effort by society to impose upon its citizens a far-reaching public morality is destructive of human character because it is destructive of the freedom to decide for oneself how to live.

So here is another apparent antinomy. Self-control is vital for the well-being of a rational animal, but some latitude for self-expression is also vital (literally so; you need it for vitality). Public morality is a desideratum but so is individuality, and each can be carried to an extreme that is harmful because it undermines the other. The point I am making is obvious; here, too, there is need for that disposition to weighing and balancing which characterizes political moderation. The current idea of the autonomous, self-sufficient, private individual inclines toward moral anarchy and is as much a mythology as the collectivist or strongly paternalistic ideologies. These are the "extremists" on this subject. Statesman-like policy has to seek a delicate balance between the demands of moral unity and the demands of individual freedom of choice. Once again we seem to have a duality of goods to be resolved, case by case as best we can, by informed perception of the existing conditions. (For example, how serious a problem is the current prominence of violent and pornographic entertainments, and what measures can be taken in our social milieu that wouldn't involve more losses in liberty than gains in public decency?)

Can we get beyond such dualities by ultimate appeal to some overarching idea of the good life by which to reflect upon the weightings and balancings? The effort to do so is criticized as "monism."³⁷ Yet, as I hope this essay has shown, we are hardly able to avoid trying to conceptualize a human good that would give coherence to the diverse goods.

Aristotle calls it "happiness" (in the Greek, *eudaimonia*), which he posits as the final end or "highest good" of all our striving. Happiness for Aristotle is not an aggregate of pleasures; it involves the development or actualization of distinctively human qualities and capabilities (those distinguishing us from other animals). These are the capabilities requisite for living an active life informed by reasoning or deliberation.³⁸ This is not simply a matter of reasoning; the inclinations, feelings, and emotions of the actualized person are habitually informed by thoughtfulness. One feels, aspires, loves, and gets angry as a rational being. It will come as no surprise that this is a comprehensive yet imprecise definition of happiness. Its imprecision, while considered a defect from some viewpoints, has the advantage that it allows for a variety of means to the end. There are many ways to live a thoughtful life, though not all ways of life would

be equally conducive thereto. According to this outlook the exercise of choice regarding how to live is an important ingredient of human fulfillment, but what one chooses is of conclusive import.

There is a modern alternative to this classical view of the *summum bonum*. As noted, Edmund Burke suggests that "a moral, regulated liberty" is what is good for both the community and the person. Tocqueville, that great liberal moderate, teaches that political freedom requires citizens who have "the use of their free will" but have also acquired "habits of restraint." And it is arguable that in the absence of habits of restraint one's choices are hardly choices at all; driven by unregulated desire you can have only preferences. As for the polity, it is an old adage that a licentious people cannot long remain a free people; sooner or later their licentiousness will have to be curtailed by coercive constraints. The paradigmatic idea of a morally and socially tempered freedom takes account of these realities and also of the liberty required for personal and political self-government. In shorthand, the idea of moral liberty can serve as an ultimate point of reference or underlying premise for our thinking about the humanly optimal.³⁹

Two reminders are in order here. Since we can think about political moderation transnationally or transculturally to some extent, much can be learned through the study of great exemplars of it from different times and places. I have referred to the American Founders, Lincoln, and Churchill. And, although time will tell, I would like to think that we are seeing in contemporary figures such as Afghanistan's Hamid Karzai the emergence of exemplary moderates in the non-Western world. Much-needed inspiration can be gained from outstanding cases of resolute yet astute confrontation with ideologically charged and dangerous political conflict.

But these very dangerous conflicts remind us of a consideration requiring still more emphasis, lest it be obscured by my emphasis upon the virtues attending political moderation. Since politics inevitably involves the exercise of power in threatening situations, moderation cannot be equated with benevolence or compassion. Nor can it be equated with justice, especially if that means the unconditional observance of cherished moral norms; the moderate statesman knows that sometimes he or she must violate ethical standards which we value and wish to see observed

as much as possible. Lincoln, a famously compassionate politician, found it necessary to authorize constitutionally dubious preventive detention of many southern sympathizers; Churchill ordered massive bombings of German cities; Karzai does what he can to stay in power. Sometimes harsh things need to be done, and political moderation therefore is not without its sharp edges.



The concept of statesmanship I have outlined can be clarified by its comparison with two conceptions of political leadership that might be thought similar to it in regard to the morality of politics. The first of these often goes by the name of "realpolitik" or Machiavellianism. Machiavelli advises his "Prince" that "a man who wants to make a profession of goodness in everything must come to ruin among so many who are not good. Hence it is necessary to a prince, if he wants to maintain himself, to learn to be able not to be good, and to use this [knowledge] and not use it according to necessity."⁴⁰

By "good," Machiavelli meant to denote those qualities or standards that are recognized as virtuous in the classical and Christian tradition, along with the conventional norms related thereto. This Machiavellian realism does have some features in common with Aristotelian realism, and it might look like basically the same thing (presented in more striking language)—if Machiavelli is interpreted this way: goodness, traditionally understood, is normative, but in certain extreme cases, which present exceptions to the general norm, one must resort reluctantly to immoral means. This is a rather benign interpretation. The more hard-boiled and, I believe, accurate interpretation is this: it is a condition of political success that one does not consider oneself at all bound by ethical injunctions or limitations; moral standards should be considered *strategically* as factors in a calculus, to be observed or abandoned as dictated by the "necessity" of the case at hand. Machiavelli asserts:

This has to be understood: that a prince, and especially a new prince, cannot observe all those things for which men are held good, since he is often under a necessity, to maintain his state, of acting against faith,

against charity, against humanity, against religion. And so he needs to have a spirit disposed to change as the winds of fortune and variation of things command him, and as I have said above, not depart from good, when possible, but know how to enter into evil, when forced by necessity.⁴¹

Clearly the clause about not departing from good when possible is hardly the dominant theme of this passage. What is dominant is a picture of political life in which such qualities as faith (that is, abiding by one's promises) and humanity (including abstention from cruelty) are de-normalized. Any close reading of *The Prince* surely reveals that the successful practitioner of great politics is faithless, cruel, and ruthless at least as often—probably more often—than he is reliable, humane, and just, though he will be "a great pretender and dissembler" so as to appear virtuous. This mode of operation is necessary, because in our world of ever-present hostility and danger you cannot maintain your power—and hence the state that depends upon power—otherwise.

Machiavelli has to be credited with discernment of harsh truths, including the harsh truth that falsehood and deception are prominent, even inescapable, factors in political affairs.⁴² This theme is pertinent to our subject only insofar as the leader's falsehoods may corrupt his own judgment of reality or are so egregious as to corrupt his followers by turning them into fanatics.

What is more pertinent is the personality of a person who would actually have the capacity to switch one's goodness on and off as variable situations dictate. What kind of person has "a spirit disposed to change as the winds of fortune" do? This utter flexibility would seem incompatible with what we think of as having a character—a set of deep-rooted convictions and more or less habitual dispositions to act in accordance with them. The authentic statesman I have tried to depict must have a character (whatever one's personal defects) that nurtures reliable inclinations to seek and defend a common good. The Machiavellian statesman, who is, we may say, super-adaptable, and hence lacking character in the usual sense, must be both unpredictable and unreliable. Unpredictability might be an advantage against one's enemies, but unreliability is no way to acquire friends.

The crucial distinction between the Machiavellian view of politics and the moderate one is rooted in the disparate visions of the social world underlying them. In Machiavelli's world, ceaseless change and lethal conflict are so predominant as to preclude any moral order at all. Therefore Machiavelli concludes, "I judge indeed that it is better to be impetuous than cautious."⁴³ On his side one must acknowledge that it is very difficult, as well as unsafe, to try to fight a war moderately. One might wonder whether in cases of dire emergency the concept of moderation has any place at all.⁴⁴ Yet there are abundant historical examples of the fact that in war impetuosity can be hazardous, too. What's more, an endeavor to observe certain humane limitations—that is, a kind of cautiousness—is advisable even in times of intense warfare. For this reason, the deliberate slaughter of civilians is generally condemned by civilized nations (or when in extreme exigency this norm is violated it is usually after debate and with professions of regret). And we are not always at war.

Max Weber has offered a conception of political leadership that is concerned with character and which seems to value moderation more than Machiavelli does. In his famous essay "Politics as a Vocation," Weber identifies the authentic possessor of that power-wielding vocation as follows: "One can say that three prominent qualities are decisive for the politician: passion, a feeling of responsibility, and a sense of proportion."⁴⁵ By the first of these terms he means passionate devotion to a cause, without which a politician cannot be effective or worthy of respect. Weber appears to demand that this devotion be qualified or balanced by the sense of responsibility and proportion, and he asks an appropriate question: "How can warm passion and cool sense of proportion be forged together in one and the same soul?"⁴⁶ This question is of great interest in any effort to understand moderation psychologically. But on attentive reading of Weber it becomes evident that wholehearted commitment to a cause is the vitally conclusive factor, and the other two qualities are ministerial to it; responsibility means assuming responsibility for the success of the cause, and the sense of proportion involves psychological detachment requisite for calculating the consequences of alternative actions with a view to its success. The result of Weberian proportionality is that actions or policies that seem to be identified with one's cherished

goal will be rejected when a cool assessment of their probable consequences shows that they would in fact retard it. In other words, one's primary political ends are determined by passionate commitments; the means—that is, the practical exercises of power—are subject to reasoned deliberation. This view of the matter is prominent in modern thought; to what extent is it a formula for moderation?

According to this view, our ultimate ends cannot be judged or shaped by reasoning; what cause a politician ought to pursue is, in the Weberian understanding, "a matter of faith." This is so because "the ultimately possible attitudes toward life are irreconcilable, and hence their struggle can never be brought to a final conclusion. Thus, it is necessary to make a decisive choice."⁴⁷ And one's decisive choice has to be dictated by a passion of some sort, there being literally no reason that it should be a moderated choice; it is basically an assertion of will.

This brief account of Weber might be thought at variance with his renowned preference for an "ethic of responsibility" over an "ethic of absolute imperatives." The latter is unconditional, demanding that one do what is (considered) right regardless of predictable results. One of Weber's foremost examples of an absolute ethic is the pacifism of the Sermon on the Mount; it will not allow its devotees to use violence—ever and no matter what. "For if it is said, in line with the acosmic ethic of love, 'Resist not him that is evil with force,'" the pacifist devotee is "responsible for the evil winning out."⁴⁸ The authentic politician, recognizing that responsibility, will use as much violence as is necessary to prevent the evil from winning out.

Weberian politics has two features in common with Aristotelian politics. Given the unavailability of categorical or universally valid moral mandates and prohibitions, situational judgment about circumstances becomes crucial. Moreover, the sense of proportion required for such judgment depends, as Weber says, upon a "firm taming of the soul"; this condition of the soul may be regarded as akin to the self-control and balanced perceptiveness characteristic of political moderation. But, as I've suggested, self-control is a complex concept; it matters a lot what aspect of the "self" is doing the controlling or is in the driver's seat.

Finally, the difference between Weberian and classical outlooks outweighs the similarities. The disparity becomes most evident when we ask

what, on the former's premises are the "evils" that are to be prevented from winning out. There is no truth discoverable about that question. The Weberian leader does not have available to him for orientation any general understanding of human well-being that is "for the most part true"; what is finally available is only an understanding of the irresolvable clash among diverse versions of what life is about. In this utterly conflicted vision of moral reality, where one's conclusive purposes must be at bottom nonrational assertions of will, what actually is the status of moderation? Assuming that vision, you might want to say that moderation is something real and important, but it is about means, not ends or aspirations. This answer will not do. Unless one subscribes to something like a prohibitive categorical imperative, one's purposes determine the relevant means calculable with a view to their success. If the ends of al-Qaida terrorists cannot reasonably be criticized as fanatically irrational, what sense would it make to judge their cool calculation of the means proportional (conductive) to them as immoderation? (By rigorous calculation, is it more effective to use passenger aircraft or biological weapons to destroy thousands or millions of infidels?)

No doubt that in a thoroughly pluralistic ethical milieu, one could make a decisive choice to observe the limitations I've been calling moderation. By an exercise of will the politician could decide—or decide to believe—that a certain freedom and a certain restraint are both compelling values to be weighted in light of his ultimate value of moral liberty. But why? That would have to be an option for which no argument can be given, and one no more subject to thoughtful evaluation than al-Qaida's choices. In such a world, the proportionate and the moderate, where they can be said to exist, are derivative products of ultimately irrational and unrestrainable commitments.

In his novel *Billy Budd*, Herman Melville depicts his villainous character, John Claggart, this way: He had "apparently little to do with reason further than to employ it as an ambidexter implement for effecting the irrational. That is to say: toward the accomplishment of an aim which in wantonness of atrocity would seem to partake of the insane, he will direct a cool judgment sagacious and sound. These are madmen."⁴⁹ I don't mean to suggest that Max Weber or his followers intentionally accommodate such characters, but one fails to find anything in the basic doctrine that

clearly makes them ineligible for "the vocation of politics" or provides a real foundation for their denunciation. In the universe Melville envisions, there is apparently a ground for judging some kinds of aims or ends insane and those pursuing them madmen. But standards for this kind of judgment are unavailable in any philosophy that precludes the thoughtful evaluation of one's dominant goals or aspirations.



What about goals and aspirations inspired by religion; to what extent, if any, are these compatible with the concept of political moderation? Consider this rather harsh argument (to which Weber might well subscribe): religious zeal necessarily gives rise to an ethic of absolute imperatives, and resolutely serious religion, at least in its monotheistic and biblical forms, is always zealous. It would not be hard to support this proposition by reference to historic warfare (the Crusades, Catholics vs. Protestants, the murderous jihads) and tyrannical regimes (the Inquisition in Europe, the Mullahs in Iran), all conducted in the name of the Deity and the Deity's awesome commands that the faith be protected or extended. Undeniably such passions have contributed and continue to contribute to many of the world's virulent conflicts.⁵⁰ Reading literally from the Sermon on the Mount, Max Weber selected a very different illustration of his claim about religious absolutism: the unconditional Christian demands for peacefulness. Read thusly, the Sermon on the Mount makes no distinction between justified and unjustified fighting; it proscribes fighting and prescribes universal love even for one's mortal enemies. The point here, however, is that sacred texts and movements deal in categorical imperatives, of one content or another, obedience to which must take precedence over any competing worldly considerations. Serious religiosity therefore seems to attack moderation from two opposite directions, creating, from one side, hostilities and strivings for predominance among diverse believers, and, on the other side, piously precluding forceful resistance to dangerous adversaries.

Counterarguments come readily to mind. The sacred texts are not to be grasped with an unreflective literalism; rather they are to be interpreted metaphorically, symbolically, inspirationally. On this kind of

premise, Christian philosophers have developed doctrines distinguishing between just and unjust wars and between permissible and impermissible methods of conducting war. Moreover, the numerous theological blessings of peacefulness can be said to perform a moderating function; stringent New Testament injunctions against hatred and anger may be regarded as conducive to the restraint of some of our most ominous propensities. Likewise the condemnation of pride and exaltation of humility can function as antidotes to the diseases of antisocial aggrandizement and despotic inclination.

I will not comment here on the salutary effects these pacific imperatives might have on private interpersonal relations, but, presented by sacred texts in terms apparently absolute, they are rather problematic as to public affairs, often militating (if that is the right word) against prudential political judgment in the face of worldly dangers and evils. It is common knowledge that Gandhi and other influential pacifists resolutely opposed armed resistance to the rise of Nazi and Fascist power. At the time of our missile crisis with Cuba and the Soviet Union, peace demonstrators insisted that the only proper response was to bring the matter before the United Nations for debate. (Our leadership adopted a middle course between entire reliance upon argument and a response so forceful as to hazard escalation toward nuclear war.)

There is a kind of theology that might serve to rescue us from the divergent threats of pious imperialism and antipolitical pacifism to which religious fervor has perennially given rise. It may be summarized as follows. Only God and one's personal relation to God can be absolute; to absolutize anything else, including any political goals or positions, is to be guilty of a form of idolatry. Because one's personal relation to the Deity is so utterly internal and mysterious, it cannot dictate imperatives, on one side or another, of our worldly conflicts. The true believer then does not proselytize, or seek the power to do so, and leaves concerns of the polity susceptible to practical judgment.

Nineteenth-century Christian theologian Søren Kierkegaard may be considered an exemplar of such a view. For Kierkegaard, the Supreme Being or Ultimate Truth is unknowable by us; faith is a "leap in the dark," which one has to take alone in fear and trembling. What authen-

tic faith finally means is a subjective affirmation in the face of radical uncertainty.⁵¹

This theology is as far from religious warfare as it is from the social gospel. Although the leap of faith has much more to do with passion than with any tempering rationality, it can be said to leave reason intact to wrestle with our sub-eternal social problems unencumbered by religious fervor. The Kierkegaardian believer is not thoroughly irrational; he has a profound awareness that the Infinite is wholly mysterious to us. (One might say that this believer, unlike the fundamentalist and a bit like Socrates, knows that he does not know.) Strictly applied, this theology does not allow for the projection upon society of fantastic and strife-inducing spiritual visions of world affairs or utopian solutions. When such visions are unleashed upon us from religious sources, it is usually from sources which insist that their faith constitutes certain knowledge of God's will.

The rigors of Kierkegaardian faith make it a rare phenomenon; among the world's spiritual devotees, authentic Kierkegaardians are not much in evidence. The pervasive consideration—the one raising far-reaching questions about religion and moderation—is that monotheism imposes obligations of unconditional allegiance to the one God above all else, including our most cherished concerns and relationships.⁵² And, as to the masses of believers, everything depends upon what their traditions and their leaders claim the Divinity has mandated. An important part of this question is *how much* of human life is deemed to be regulated by sacred requirements. When the mandates are deemed not only categorical but also totalitarian—that is, encompassing the entirety of personal and social life⁵³—then the tension between religion and rational prudence is at its height.

Insofar as the tension we've been exploring threatens political moderation, three possible modes of alleviation come to mind. First, religious plurality—what James Madison called a "multiplicity of sects"—can alleviate by precluding the emergence of a monolithic zealotry. No need to elaborate this familiar point here, except to note that as such it doesn't preclude a multiplicity of fanatical sects. Second (and more controversially if stated bluntly), religious commitments could be softened, diluted

(so to speak), or made less prominent in the lives of believers. This, I would argue, was one of the projects of that epoch-making philosophic movement called the Enlightenment, which sought to replace "superstition" with a rational and scientific view of reality. The project was meant to affect not only philosophic thought but also society at large and eventually the mind of the average person. Tocqueville, influenced in part by the Enlightenment, saw religion as an indispensable corrective for the self-centered materialism that democratic societies foster, but he was concerned about fanatical spirituality—"bizarre sects" and "religious follies" that drive their devotees "far beyond the bounds of common sense."⁵⁴ Evidently Tocqueville supposed that religious belief and practice should, and can, be tempered by common sense—that is, by a form of rationality.

This expectation seems at first glance quite implausible and at variance with things I've just said. But, after all, there are in the modern world many who are considered religious moderates, whose passion for the Eternal is either less fervent or more accommodating to the interests of secular society than was that of their ancestors. (Contemporary American Presbyterianism is a far cry from that of John Calvin and John Knox.) If this is what we mean by religious moderation, how can it come about on a large scale? You rarely bring it about by directly confronting true believers with rational arguments. It comes about largely because minds are affected gradually by the predominant social and ideological environment. Two elements of this process deserve special notice. Where science and technology flourish, where Enlightenment attitudes are "in the air," the effect is a kind of matter-of-fact mentality to which the mysterious and the mythological, including most aspects of scriptural revelation, are alien. Max Weber called this process "the disenchantment of the world." Another source of disenchantment is widespread taste for the numerous worldly gratifications and comforts that commercial modernity can confer. The bourgeois man is unlikely to become an inspired zealot, ideological or theological. (And, by the way, he is not the man to risk life for the sake of glory or "honor.") Hence, the dangers of fanaticism are alleviated.

This is an alleviation with difficulties of its own, including the danger that it will be carried far in the direction of spiritual indifference

and a sophisticated disbelief that there can be anything mysterious or transcendent or more important than one's life, liberty, and property. We are therefore led to consider the third way of protecting the civic community from disruption by spiritually incited extremism. This antidote, usually called "separation of church and state," is one of the several defining features of a liberty polity, though it is not confined thereto. The idea most pertinent here is that when government is constitutionally prohibited from becoming an instrument for advancement of any religion, society is secured from one of the greatest threats to its harmony: the civil discord that results from struggles of religious groups for political power⁵⁵ and infection of political issues with sectarian or intolerant passions that make them uncompromisable. A legally mandated (or otherwise assured) distinction between legitimate concerns of state and religious concerns does not guarantee that either will be moderate, but it is a necessary condition for a politics reasonably prudential and balanced (consider the stark alternatives to this condition recently illustrated by Northern Ireland, Sudan, and Iran). Even extremism itself may eventually be tempered when zealots are compelled to face the fact that they cannot advance their cause through acquisition of governmental power.

But is an absolute separation of church and state a real possibility? Even where "an establishment of religion" is constitutionally prohibited, as by our First Amendment, the state and the church, the civic and the religious spheres, cannot be wholly insulated from each other. Multifarious occasions for their interaction exist, and where to draw the line is a never-ending perplexity confronting the federal courts. In principle, governmental policy crosses the line if it interferes with a religious practice because that practice is viewed as impious, deliberately favors some churches over others, or gives public funds directly to churches to be used for religious purposes. But what about the tax exemption for church properties, a "moment of silence" in public schools, the expression "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance, the old practice of opening sessions of Congress and state legislatures with a chaplain's invocation, or the declaration of a day of Thanksgiving by the president of the United States?⁵⁶ Such traditions presuppose that recognition of the Deity has a place in American public life. That idea is what puristic separationists

emphatically deny, some going so far as to seek the total exclusion of religious symbols and affirmations from the public sphere. This extremity of separationist fervor is itself a kind of absolutism; after all, we are devoted to "free exercise" as well as "no establishment," and religion does have a historic morality-promoting and ennobling role to play in this country. A jurisprudence of moderation on this subject will decide Establishment issues on a case-by-case basis, which allows for the recognition that there is more than one principle at stake and more than one good to be served or evil to be avoided. Hence even here there is such a thing as extremism and moderation. The latter recognizes the complex reality that in democracies faith-based morality is inevitably among the motivators of political causes or movements (sometimes desirably; sometimes not)—and that the utilization of government for objectives predominantly religious is the great danger to be avoided. This is no simple matter. On this subject, as on so many others concerning the public good, there is need for balanced judgment.



These brief references to legal matters point to a large topic without which our discussion would be incomplete: the idea of the rule of law. The law is often regarded as a great moderator, as is implied by the revered principle of "a government of laws not men."⁵⁷ In the tradition that invokes this idea, the law is seen as a body of general rules and principles standing above and regulating, more or less impartially, the unruly passions and biases of men. Insofar as this vision corresponds to reality, or can be made to do so, the need for statesmanship may be diminished.

This venerated idea is easy to ridicule. Here is what Thomas Hobbes, a relentless ridiculer, had to say:

And therefore this is another error of Aristotle's politics, that in a well-ordered commonwealth, not men should govern but the laws. What man that has his natural senses, though he can neither write nor read, does not find himself governed by men he fears and believes can kill or hurt him when he obeyth not? Or believes the law can hurt him; that is, words and paper, without the hands and swords of men.⁵⁸

To put it in less colorful language, laws are made and enforced by those persons or groups who have the power to do so; hence the law is not what actually *rules*—it cannot be the fundamental governor of a polity.

Aristotle recognized this reality. He indicated clearly enough that the laws inevitably reflect the wants and outlooks of those who make them, and that the constitution of a country is part and parcel of its political regime. (Oligarchic regimes will make laws on behalf of the property owners; democratic regimes will make egalitarian and redistributive ones on behalf of the many who are not economically well off, etc.)⁵⁹ Still, from the Aristotelian and classical perspectives, it makes a substantial difference how the governing interests are expressed—whether they are expressed as long-term general rules and principles or only as edicts and fiat dictated by the momentary will of either the few or the many. An oligarchy with a constitution is preferable to oligarchy raw and unrefined. A constitutional democracy is better than a wholly plebiscitary one.

As John Locke puts it, when you have "a standing rule to live by," enacted by the legislative authority, you are "not . . . subject to the inconsistent, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary will of another man."⁶⁰ By a "standing rule," Locke means one that has existed publicly for some length of time, and hence was enacted well in advance of the particular situations to which it is applied. Government by laws in this sense facilitates liberty by precluding certain arbitrary, unpredictable, coercive interventions in our lives. Where effective, such a legal order allows us to plan our lives in relatively secure awareness of what others will or won't do to us. (Motorists will usually stop at the red light, government officials will seldom break into your home without a warrant or probable cause, and taxes will be collected in accordance with some knowable standards or classifications.)

The rule of law, thusly understood, can also be viewed as a contributor to moderation. Laws deserving the name are results of deliberation about public interests much more comprehensive than the individual or factional interests to be regulated by them. Of course the legislative body is an arena for factional conflict and bargaining among self-interested or opinionated groups—hence the old joke about two things one doesn't want to see in the process of being produced: sausages and law. But with

regard to the latter, the joke tells only half the story. When different viewpoints are in contention and contending arguments are made, the legislators are impelled to engage in some deliberation. And when a chosen policy is to have the authority of law, it must take the form of general rules applicable not only now but in a distant future and to persons one does not know. These requisites introduce an element of rationality operating within a horizon broader than that within which ordinary persons and groups in society usually operate. (The paradigmatic case is a constitutional convention.) This is the degree of truth embodied in the old and persistent idea that law is something dispassionate. Though bias and interest certainly enter into the production of law, the outcome—the rule intended to delimit conduct—is typically more dispassionate than you and I are in our everyday strivings and controversies. For example, the labor laws of the country might well be biased in favor of the workers or their employers, but they are much less so than the union and the corporation in the throes of a particular dispute.

But the virtue of law—its universality or generality—is sometimes a vice. The underlying reason for this anomaly, upon which I've already commented enough, is the variability and unruliness of human relations and problems that render them unamenable to dogmatic resolution or resolution simply by abstract precepts. We cannot, and wouldn't want to, be governed entirely by rules even if it were possible to construct thoroughly impartial ones. This reality mandates a large role for the prudential "judgment call," including—and especially—statesmanship. Even John Locke, who famously proclaimed that "no man in civil society can be exempted from the laws of it,"⁶¹ finds it necessary to acknowledge the limits of the rule of law. "Many things there are which the law can by no means provide for, and those must necessarily be left to the discretion of him that has the executive power."⁶² That is, there are many things that have to be decided outside the law and occasionally even against it. (As, arguably, Lincoln did when he authorized mass preventative detentions of Confederate supporters.) Matters of national security and foreign policy provide the foremost, but by no means the only, illustrations of that sometimes unpleasing reality.

Overemphasis upon the control of human affairs by general rules is what we are complaining about when we complain about "legalism," and

legalism is also unpleasing, is it not? The rule of law is a blessing—where you can really have it—but, like separation of church and state, it is a moderator itself in need of modification.

I cannot leave this subject, however, without tribute to the aspiration for impartiality or disinterestedness that is at the heart of the idea of the rule of law. The ideal model is the image we have of the judge scrupulously weighing both sides of the case in the scales of justice and with a view to the truth. As far as civic life is concerned, this is the concept of moderation at its pinnacle.⁶³ Moderation at this judicial height—the capacity to distance oneself from partisan claims and even from one's own inclinations—is a rare thing; it hardly comes naturally. Where we can get approximation to it, in courts and elsewhere, the approximations usually depend much upon institutional and public support for the enterprise, that is, a public opinion that respects and believes in it. And such a public opinion will depend upon a delicate combination of education and inspiration to counteract our natural partisanship.

Liberal education, at its best, promotes respect for impartiality by placing us at a certain intellectual distance from immediacy, facilitating a disposition to stand back from the ideological clamor of our time and reflect upon ideas "on all sides" of questions perennial. It encourages what may be called a theoretical perspective or a contemplative one. The emphasis upon theory and alternative theories characteristic of a good liberal education can perform a distancing function for those citizens amenable to it. The philosophic model here is Socratic truth-seeking, which seeks understanding for its own sake.⁶⁴

This has been an effort to identify the several dimensions of political moderation and to show how, despite its vicissitudes, this concept is broadly appropriate in the complex affairs of such beings as we are. Moderation, as we've seen, is not so much a particular policy as it is an attitude, a disposition, an orientation. The orientation defined here is not the only political virtue, nor is it always the most important thing, but it is always important. This orientation is possible because we are self-conscious beings with the potentiality for reflective detachment, occasionally even from ourselves. It is needed because our reflections, more often than not, become the instruments of passion—loves and hates, anger and compassion, fears and hopes (frequently excessive), and pride, which can

take the form of vanity or lust for power. We are much concerned with self-centered material gratifications but able to aspire beyond material interests to more spiritual ones, with results sometimes elevating, sometimes quite harmful. Exaggerated hopes for a better social life may lead us to entertain unrealistically absolute solutions and long for (dangerous) utopias. Maximalist demands upon the world, conjoined with anger, are at the core of much fanaticism and strife. So too are fervent beliefs, fueled by human pride, that the great tensions and uncertainties of life are intolerable and can be eradicated by application of pure rationality. We are such beings as can be led astray by excessive claims or pretenses to knowledge as well as by irrational appetites and emotions.

Most simply put, the case for political moderation rests finally on the realization that human nature is located as far from the purely benign as it is from the simply bestial, and our various inclinations are often in contradiction. Moderation then is not only a necessary virtue: it is also a fragile virtue.