[This was excised because Hass made this point multiple times – Robert Von Stricker Beresford]

The actual world doesn't conform to our created moral standards, so we don't need to hold government to these standards despite what the metaphysicians and metaphysicists tell us. The same can be said for individual policies. We judge a government's actions based on our laws and our laws are based, not on one specific moral code, but on aspects of the numerous different codes, those aspects that have shown their practicality, usefulness, historical value and the like, with regard to keeping citizens safe from their leaders...and vice versa.

Having a moral foreign policy or a moral domestic policy sure sounds nice. But how do we go about that? Obviously we have to start by picking a moral code. Regrettably, moral codes are aspirational things, rather than things based in actual behaviour. So there's a problem. Then, though we may all disagree about whether or not a political leader can conform their behaviour to such and such moral code,[1] we can observe that even our best political processes fail to select leaders who will conform their behaviour entirely to a moral code (despite what these leaders might say publicly). Incidentally, I think we should think of all of our political (or otherwise) leaders as Al Swearengens. Being a professional politician (by professional I don't mean someone who's served on a city council for forty years) tends to make one see the world in different terms, it turns you into someone who is willing to blur the ethical lines to get what the deem necessary. This analogy isn't meant to say that all political leaders are as unethical as cut-throat saloon owners, but rather that they have the potential to be and, further, that we should treat them with the appropriate skepticism *at all times*. Would you trust Swearengen? No, of course not. And so you shouldn't trust politicians.

To think in terms of morality in politics is inappropriate. Moral codes are about strict behaviour and politics is about compromise. And since there is no code that is the best, there is no code that will take a regular human being (let alone one we might think of as "evil") and make that human perfect or even relatively moral, if that human being agrees to follow that code *to the letter*. We will always all be

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1   Editor's Note: Augustine would say no.

humans, and we are always going to be confronted by difficult, moral choices, that cannot be solved by any one moral code. We, as individuals and as a society, always need to make difficult moral choices; more often than not these difficult moral choices will be wrong, or at least wrong for some people. We need to review and make new choices and the only political way I know of doing that is through free elections and free speech. These things drastically conflict with most moral codes.

"Ethics, too, are nothing but reverence for life. That is what gives me the fundamental principle of morality, namely, that good consists in maintaining, promoting, and enhancing life, and that destroying, injuring, and limiting life are evil" (Schweitzer). I would qualify that by saying *human* life. "We have better chances of supporting moral responsibility in its ever-increasing task if we humbly realize and acknowledge that it is 'only' a compensatory mechanism of very limited strength and that…it derives what power it has from the same kind of motivational sources as those which it has been created to control" (Lorenz 1966, 219).

To have a moral society is not a goal. In fact I think the concept "moral society" is vacuous. What we want is moral citizens (and especially leaders), citizens who behave to each other within the limits of the established criminal system (provided that criminal code is something appropriate), but go beyond it. Who surprise us with their behaviour, going out of their way to do what isn't required but that will make others' lives better. We can't force people to be that way; if we value any kind of authenticity.[2] We can't, and shouldn't, force people to forgive, or to make promises, or to be nice or decent. But we can encourage it. And we can erect a framework where that kind of behaviour happens more often than it does in other kinds of places. And that's the best we can do.

On these themes of morality and justice, I guess I should outright answer that fundamental question: Does government have the ability (the power is irrelevant if it's not possible) to make people better? Of course it doesn't! It doesn't matter which human being(s) we put in charge, the government

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2 "Most ironists confine this longing to the private sphere...Proust did and as Nietzsche and Heidegger should have done....The compromise [I advocate]...amounts to saying: Privatize the Nitzschean-Sartrean-Foucauldian attempt at authenticity and purity, in order to prevent yourself from slipping into a political attitude which will lead you to think that there is some social goal more important than avoiding cruelty" (Rorty 1990, 65)

will not make us better people. The government can change our behaviour overtime in general ways (seat belts being the best example)[3] but this doesn't make us morally better. In the seatbelt example, not everyone complies anyway. Just the other day, my dad watched the passengers of two-thirds of the cars he saw park somewhere not wear seat belts.   In any case, people won't become better because of seat belts. Maybe some lives will be saved. But nobody is going to become inherently *better* because they wore a seatbelt everyday.

The government, even a government run by religious fanatics, cannot make people better, no matter how many millions of people are killed in order to do this. And that is the danger with any belief about a morally superior form of government and the problem with the Straussian project, amongst other things. Eventually, people need to be forced to be 'good' (however the government defines good) and at some point the force exceeds said government's definition of 'good.' Someone gives what is apparently a 'good' reason for this and the government then uses evil to do 'good.' And somewhere along this line torture and death are used a great deal. The removal of this government concerned with 'good' often requires outside force.

As much as the Greeks may be interesting, let's stop trying to revive their project. Please. It isn't much to ask. Plato doesn't help me, as a Canadian concerned with liberal democracy. Many people think he does help me, and they might chide me for only reading a few dialogues. But you know what? Fuck that shit. Yes, that's right: Fuck Plato. I do not believe in executions of people over ten years of age, and I don't care if that's because I'm over ten and therefore biased.

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3   Editor's Note: This example came from one of Hass' professors, who saw it as proof that we can in fact change behaviour