

## **Revolution, Ideology, and Moral Progress**

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This paper explores the question of when social-political revolutions are likely to produce results that count as moral progress, from a broadly liberal-democratic, perspective. It is imperative to answer this question in order to know what the practical attitude of persons with liberal-democratic commitments ought to be toward revolutions.

Our basic methodological assumption is that a fruitful approach to the morality of revolution, including an inquiry into the conditions under which individuals and groups with broadly liberal-democratic moral commitments should support or oppose a revolution, must be grounded in an empirically-backed explanatory account of how revolutions originate and develop. More specifically, we argue that an account of the morality of revolution must be sensitive to the fact that different revolutionary contexts are likely to yield different results—moral progress in some cases, but no improvement or regression in others.

The explanatory account we advance begins with the assumption that revolutionaries must solve a cooperation problem and a coordination problem. We argue that, under the conditions in which revolutions are now likely to occur, aspiring revolutionary leaders are better able to solve the cooperation and the coordination problems when they cultivate and exploit a certain kind of ideology, one that (1) presents the revolutionary struggle in Manichean terms, (2) confers extreme deference on those it identifies as the leaders of the revolution, and (3) includes a belief in the ubiquity of counter-revolutionary conspiracies that helps sustain participation in the face of apparent failures of leadership or other setbacks to the revolution. We then argue that this kind of revolutionary ideology empowers and incentivizes the revolutionary leadership to create a post-revolutionary regime that is oppressive. Next, we develop normative conclusions concerning the ethics of revolution and intervention in revolution, grounded in this explanatory framework.

Our conclusion is not that revolutions are always likely to fail to yield moral progress or that those with liberal-democratic commitments should never engage in or support revolutions. Rather, it is that revolutions are only likely to produce morally progressive results, at least from a broadly liberal-democratic perspective, under certain specific conditions.