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**Politics and the Limits of Philosophy:
Political Realism and the Limits of the
Political Realist Critique**

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Declaration

I confirm that the submitted work contains neither material from any prior theses nor any material that has already been published. The thesis is my own work submitted for the degree of PhD in Politics and International Studies at the University of Warwick.

Summary

This thesis will argue that political theory is a diverse field with many questions that can be asked. Because of this, the disagreement between political realism and moralism is not as stark as it may seem. There are four main sections in this thesis. The first section (chapter 1-2) will discuss the idea of a distinctively political normativity. Political realists argue that there is a normativity internal to politics, and we should not apply external moral standards to the domain of politics. I discuss the main strategies that political realists have used to establish this distinctively political normativity and show that they fail to achieve the result political realists want. The second section (chapter 3-4) develops a version of political realism and the political realist critique that does not rely on a distinctively political normativity. I argue that political realists want political theorists to theorise about politics with an ethic of responsibility. Chapter 4 applies the political realist critique to three examples of political philosophy. The third section (chapter 5-6) develops the moralist response. It is here that I show that not all political philosophy has to guide real political agents engage in political struggle directly. Chapter 5 discusses the many roles that political theory can play, and the political realist attempt to limit political theory is unsuccessful. Chapter 6 shows how even political theorists who are interested in stability do not have to theorise about politics in the way that political realists want. Finally, the last section (chapter 7) discusses how the political realist position relies on several metaethical/metaphysical claims about how our moral convictions are the product of a particular history. I argue that this scepticism is implausible because it attempts to undermine the validity of moral justification through an explanation of how we obtained our convictions.

Introduction

To the best of my knowledge, there is no book called *Moral Moral Theory*. The same is true for many other fields. There is no *Economic Economic Theory*, or *Aesthetic Aesthetic Theory*.¹ However, when we look at the field of political theory, we find Jeremy Waldron's recent book entitled *Political Political Theory*. What explains this disparity? It has been several decades since Isaiah Berlin asked the question 'Does Political Theory Still Exist?' (Berlin, 2013). We no longer ask this question. Since the publication of *A Theory of Justice* by John Rawls, new advances of ambitious and systematic political philosophy have been made in the field of normative political philosophy.² However, the fact that there is a book called *Political Political Theory* suggests that people are still uncertain about the identity of this resurgence of political philosophy. What is political theory? What is the proper relationship between political theory and real political practice?

The uncertainty and uneasiness of the identity of contemporary political philosophy are understandable. Canonical works by John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, G. A. Cohen, and Robert Nozick have established sophisticated debates about what justice demands, what equality is, and what an ideal society should look like. However, when we look at real political affairs today, there is a huge gap between the ideal and what is real. The gap is also widening. In the last few decades, politics in most liberal democratic societies has become much more polarised (Sunstein, 2018). Global inequality is on the rise (Savoia, 2017). We are starting to see the devastating effects of climate change and yet climate change denial is becoming a more popular political position (Leber, 2018). Finally, we can no longer take the survival of democracy for granted (Moyo, 2018). Philosophers have always questioned the relationship between political theory and practice. However, the growing gap between the discourse of political philosophy and real politics has made these questions more pertinent.

¹ There are of course books that question the nature of moral or economic theory. Sceptics will argue that there is no such thing as morality. Behavioural economists might argue that their approach to economics is better than others. However, I do not believe there is a significant 'counter current' in these domains that argues that practitioners are simply talking about something else.

² In this thesis, I will use the terms political philosophy and political theory interchangeably.

In recent decades, a new countermovement has emerged (or re-emerged) in what has been referred to as the methodological disputes of political theory. I say re-emerged because this countermovement argues that political theory should more resemble the work done by Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Nietzsche, and Weber. William Galston grouped a number of political philosophers who questioned contemporary political theory's relationship with political practice under the label 'political realism' (Galston, 2010). Political realists have made many complaints about 'mainstream' political philosophy. They claim that it is "too abstract, lacking concrete implications from guiding actual political practice ... unrealistic in its ambitions to radically change the status quo ... marginalises empirical knowledge as an important constituent of political judgment ... offers no explanatory insight into the nature of politics ... too universalistic, assuming that a single set of principles apply over too wide a range of space and time ... [and] makes overly optimistic assumptions about human nature or the willingness of political actors to follow high-minded principles" (Maynard and Worsnip, 2018, 757-758). Galston grouped the wide variety of political realists with one unifying theme, which he described as "the belief that high liberalism [of Rawls and Dworkin] represents a desire to evade, displace, or escape from politics" (Galston, 2010, 386). Politics is a unique and complex sphere of human activity (Sleat, 2016a). Mainstream political philosophers have lost sight of what is specific, unique, and value about politics (Sleat, 2018). Political realists aim to engage in normative theorising about politics in a way that restores this sight and fleshes out the "appropriate standards of evaluation [that] arise from within politics rather than from an external moral standpoint" (Galston, 2010, 387-388).

The Central Argument

While much work on political realism has emerged in the last decade, I believe there still is confusion over what political realism is and what it stands for. In 2017, David Estlund, a political theorist who has been deeply involved with debates about methodology in political theory, wrote a paper that set out several conceptions of what political realism could be and shows there is a significant amount of obscurity in some of their central claims (Estlund, 2017). For example, political realists argue that there is a normativity internal to politics and that this normativity "does not represent a morality which is prior to politics" (IBWD, 5). Given the distinctive nature of politics as a

complex sphere of human activity, there is a distinctively political normativity, and it would be inappropriate to apply or evaluate this political normativity from the perspective of moral normativity. These are complex statements that need to be fleshed out. There needs to be some discussion of what politics (and what morality) is. What does it mean for there to be a moral principle that does not represent a morality which is prior to politics? How can we plausibly establish this distinctively political normativity, while ensuring that we also hold a charitable conception of moral normativity? One of the main aims of this thesis is to provide more analytical clarity and rigour to some of the fundamental tenets of political realism.

This thesis can be divided into four sections. The first section (Chapter 1 and 2) will critically discuss the main argumentative strategies that political realists use to establish a distinctively political normativity and argue that they are unsuccessful. I provide a comprehensive account of what politics is and what problem it is meant to solve. I show how the arguments made by political realists are insufficient to show that moral standards should not be used to evaluate politics. The second section (Chapter 3 and 4) will develop a version of political realism and the political realist critique that does not rely on a distinctively political normativity. Political realists have put too much emphasis on the idea of a distinctively political normativity. There are other resources within the canonical texts of political realism that can be used to develop a unique position in the methodological debates. Williams found the state of political science and political theory today frustrating. Political theory was intensely moralised, while political science was about private and group interest. Williams believed that these two forms of thought were “made for each other. They represent a Manichaeian dualism of soul and body, high-mindedness and the pork barrel, and the existence of each helps to explain how anyone could have accepted the other” (*IBWD*, 12). Williams advocated an ethic of responsibility, which meant holding “a broader view of politics, not confined to interest, together with a more realistic view of the powers, opportunities, and limitations of political actors where all the considerations that bear on political action – both ideals and, for example, political survival – can come to one focus of decision” (*IBWD*, 12). I argue that political realists want political theorists to theorise about politics with an ethic of responsibility. To put it simplistically, this involves providing an accurate model/interpretation of the political landscape (who has power and what do they

want?), assess the power a political agent has and theorise with “a form of practical reason better suited to political agents acting in the political realm” (Sleat, 2018, 7).

The third section (Chapter 5 and 6) develops what non-political realists can say in response to the main criticisms made by political realists. It is here that I will make most of my main arguments against the political realist critique. I will argue that there is not as much disagreement between political realism and political moralism and that attempting to restrict the content of what counts as political theory too much is implausible. At times, political realists provide quite narrow accounts of what political theory should be. For example, Geuss argues that “political theory **must** be realist” (Geuss, 2008, 9, emphasis mine). John Dunn argues that the “purpose of political theory is to diagnose practical predicaments and to show us how best to confront them” (Dunn, 1990, 193). I believe it is much more plausible to argue that political theory is a diverse field “accommodating highly abstract inquiries ... as well as more grounded forms of reflection that begin by paying close attention to the political problems we face” (Mason, 2016, 32). Political realists need to give more argument for why we should hold the exclusive account of political theory and its purpose when there is a more inclusive one available. I reject the main arguments that political realists use to restrict what counts as political theory.

The final section (Chapter 7) will discuss what I refer to as the Historicist Scepticism claim, which is another major tenet of political realism. According to political realists, political philosophy needs to be historically contextual. Theorists who neglect their history forget that their theories are not “simply autonomous products of moral reason” and are instead intuitive for them because their moral and political convictions are the product of a particular history and conflict (IBWD. 13). If this claim is correct, we have to accept that political theory should be realist, and that non-realists are engaging in a flawed enterprise. My aim is to dissect these tenets and systematically analyse the arguments political realists use (or might use) to justify these tenets and critically engage with them. I reject the implications that historical contingency has on our moral and political views.

A Preview of the Thesis

Chapter 1 will set out a general introduction to political realism and its position in the methodological disputes of political theory. It will discuss what ideal and non-ideal theory is and provide an overview of what disagreements ideal theorists have had with non-ideal theorists. I will then compare those debates with what political realists are arguing against, namely political moralism. One of the main features of political realism that separates it from non-ideal theory is its attempt to establish a distinctively political normativity. This chapter will dissect the political realist claim that politics is a solution to a problem and show how this is the basis for a distinctively political normativity.

Chapter 2 will critically engage with the main argumentative strategies that political realists have used to establish a distinctively political normativity. I show how merely establishing a normativity internal to politics is not enough. Political realists need to show that there is something inappropriate about evaluating this distinctively political normativity from an external moral perspective. The main arguments that political realists have provided are insufficient to meet this need.

Chapter 3 will establish what I consider to be the best version of political realism. Political realists want to theorise about politics with an ethic of responsibility. I clearly set out at least three different tasks involved in theorising about politics with an ethic of political responsibility, namely modelling the political landscape, guiding political agents to act under circumstances of radical disagreement and limited power, and ensuring that political institutions are sensitive to the constitutive features of politics. Political realism does not have to tie itself to an implausible account of political normativity to offer something unique and interesting.

Chapter 4 will build on the discussion of the previous chapter and develop the political realist critique. It will apply the critique to three examples of non-ideal theory, namely *The Ethics of Immigration* by Joseph Carens, *How Not to be a Hypocrite: School Choice for the Morally Perplexed* by Adam Swift and *Is Democracy Possible Here?* by Ronald Dworkin. It will do this to avoid the uncharitable generalisations made by many political theorists engaged in methodological disputes.

Chapter 5 will defend two main claims. The first is that there not much of a gap between the political realist position and the political moralist one because no sensible political

moralist would reject the ethic of responsibility. The second is that we should be cautious when it comes to restricting political theory and what it should be. Being practical cannot be the entire *raison d'être* of political philosophy. It will argue “political theory is a diverse field, accommodating highly abstract inquiries that aim to identify fundamental normative principles by putting to one side facts about our natures and the circumstances in which we live, as well as more grounded forms of reflection that begin by paying close attention to the political problems we face” (Mason, 2016, 32). It will do this by rejecting some of the main strategies that political realists use to restrict the definition of political theory.

Chapter 6 rejects the view that if a political theorist is interested in the issue of stability, he or she will have to theorise about politics with an ethic of responsibility. Political realists have pointed at Rawls’s insistence on stability as a desideratum of justice. Realists argue that due to the deep disagreement that exists in politics, Rawls can never construct a set of liberal principles that can achieve an overlapping consensus necessary for a stable conception of justice. I will show that even though Rawls is concerned with stability, what he means by stability is very different from the way that political realists use the term stability. They are asking different questions, and as I argued in the previous chapter, more needs to be said about why Rawls political theory is wrong or is not ‘political’.

Finally, Chapter 7 will discuss some of the metaethical and metaphysical views of political realism (I will generally use the term ‘metaethical views’ for the sake of simplicity). I argue that there are several arguments that political realists (mostly implicitly) rely on, such as the belief that there is no Archimedean Point to validate our moral beliefs. This chapter will do two things. Firstly, it will make a positive case for a version of moral realism, one that believes that there are irreducibly normative truths. Secondly, (and more importantly) it will reject the arguments that suggest that our moral and political views can only be ‘our’ moral and political views. There will be several argumentative strategies, but the main one will be to show how political realists are committing a form of genetic fallacy. One cannot undermine a moral justification with an explanation of where our moral convictions came from. Political philosophy can learn a lot from its history, but more needs to be said about why political philosophy needs history.

Chapter 1 – Political Realism and the Methodological Disputes of Contemporary Political Theory

What is political realism? As mentioned in the introduction, answering this question can be very difficult. The wide variety of views held by its ‘charter members’ can make it difficult to make accurate generalisations. If political realists are advocating a ‘more realistic’ approach to political philosophy, it can also be difficult to see what is unique about political realism as a position in the methodological disputes of political theory. Are they saying anything different to the critiques made by non-ideal theorists such as Elizabeth Anderson, Colin Farrelly, and Amartya Sen, against ideal theories of justice?

Political realists believe they have “a certain sort of truthfulness or fidelity in relation to the character of politics itself” (Sleat, 2018, 2). Bernard Williams, one of the main sources of political realist thought, wanted political theorists to ‘give more autonomy’ to “distinctively political thought” (IBWD, 2). Galston argued that “this is not meant to imply that politics is amoral or immoral; rather, appropriate standards of evaluation arise from within politics rather than from an external moral standpoint” (Galston, 2010, 387-388). This chapter aims to expand upon these claims and show where the political realist position lies in the methodological disputes of political theory. What does it mean to give more autonomy to distinctively political thought? Where do these appropriate standards of politics come from and how are they justified?

This chapter will do this in several steps. The first is to set up several other positions in the methodological disputes. What is ideal theory and non-ideal theory? What are the main disagreements between ideal and non-ideal theorists? I will then compare those debates with what political realists are arguing against, namely political moralism. In what way is political realism versus moralism different from ideal versus non-ideal theory? The third section of this chapter will do the main work of developing one of the main contributions of political realists, namely a distinctively political normativity. Political realists argue that politics is a solution to a problem. This section will discuss what problem politics is trying to solve, and in what way politics is meant to solve it. Finally, I will show how this distinctively political normativity sets political realism apart from non-ideal theorists in the methodological disputes.

1. 1 – Ideal Theory, Non-Ideal Theory, and a Theory of Ideals

One of the best places to start with what the term ‘ideal theory’ means is with Rawls, who coined the terms ideal and non-ideal theory. Rawls himself set out two important conditions for ideal theory. The first is ‘strict compliance’, which he describes as the condition where everyone accepts the ideal principles of justice and “is presumed to act justly and to do his part in upholding just institutions” (*T&J*, 8). The second condition is that we theorise about justice under favourable circumstances, which usually refers to “historical, social, and economic circumstances” that are conducive for the achievement of a well-ordered society (Rawls, 2001, 5). Of course, there are limits to these two conditions. These idealised circumstances still need to stay within the realm of what is “realistically practicable” in order to ensure that the resultant principles of justice are realistically utopian (*PL*, 13).

Based on this depiction of ideal theory, Rawls defined non-ideal theory as the absence of either one (or both) of these conditions. Instead of full acceptance and full compliance with the principles of justice by individuals, we have partial compliance. At times, Rawls also referred to non-ideal theory as ‘partial compliance theory’ (*T&J*, 8). Rawls believed that potential topics of discussion in non-ideal theory were a “theory of punishment, the doctrine of just war, and the justification of the various ways of opposing unjust regimes, ranging from civil disobedience and conscientious objection to militant resistance and revolution.” (*T&J*, 8). Instead of favourable conditions, we discuss cases where societies lack the socio-economic conditions that are required to achieve and maintain a well-ordered society regulated by a public conception of justice. Rawls’s non-ideal theory in his *Law of Peoples* engages with what he refers to as ‘Burdened Societies’, which are societies that either lack the resources necessary to achieve/maintain a just scheme of cooperation or lack the public political culture and traditions that are conducive to achieve/maintain a just society (Rawls, 2001).

The literature on ideal and non-ideal theory has expanded quite a bit since Rawls discussed the terms. While some have used the original distinction in the way that Rawls set out, there is not a lot of agreement within the literature on how we should use these terms. At this stage, the literature seems to recognise that there were a few more important features that Rawls’s initial depiction fails to capture. When you refer to

something as either ideal or non-ideal, it seems plausible to say that the ‘idealness’ of a theory should be a scalar property rather than a binary one. The most comprehensive typology available in the literature of ideal and non-ideal theory is the one established by Hamlin and Stemplowska. They argue that there are four different dimensions in which we can discuss the ideal or non-ideal nature of political theory. The first is the distinction between full and non-compliance.³ The second is the distinction between idealisation and abstraction (which they admit is too murky to act as the basis of the distinction between ideal and non-ideal theory). The third is the dimension of fact sensitivity. Finally, the fourth is the distinction between perfect justice and a theory of local improvement in justice (Hamlin and Stemplowska, 2012, 49-51). They argue that with these four dimensions, “the conceptual map of the ideal/non-ideal theory territory ... is more usefully construed as a multidimensional continuum” (Hamlin and Stemplowska, 2012, 49).

Hamlin and Stemplowska establish a separate position from the multidimensional continuum of ideal and non-ideal theory, which they refer to as a ‘theory of ideals’. These four dimensions seem to be relevant only in the process of identifying “social arrangements that will promote, instantiate, honour or otherwise deliver on the relevant ideals”, which we can broadly refer to as ‘institutional design’ (Hamlin and Stemplowska, 2012, 53). However, political philosophers do not necessarily have to think in terms of institutional design. They might be more interested in things such as linguistic or conceptual analysis. It seems implausible that we can talk about compliance or non-compliance when we are simply trying to discuss what the concept of ‘freedom’ means. They argue that there is a separate task that political philosophers can engage in, one where it would be inappropriate to apply the multidimensional continuum. The task of someone engaging in the theory of ideals is “to identify, elucidate, and clarify the nature of an ideal or ideals ... one devoted to the identification and explication of ideals or principles (equality, liberty, etc.), the other devoted to the issues arising from the multiplicity of ideals or principles (issues of commensurability, priority, trade-off, etc.)” (Hamlin and Stemplowska, 2012, 53).

³ They plausibly argue that ‘formal full compliance’ should not be the defining feature of an ideal theory because it would make the question of institutional design irrelevant.

Even with this multidimensional continuum, the terms ‘ideal’ and ‘non-ideal’ theory can be frustrating, as one theorist’s ‘ideal’ could be another’s ‘non-ideal’. G. A. Cohen argues that Rawls’s ideal theory is ‘too realistic’ (Swift and Stemplowska, 2017, 386). Cohen believes that if justice incorporates facts, it is not a fundamental principle of justice (Cohen, 2008). Another limitation of using these terms is that we can think of ideal versions of non-ideal problems. A good example of this might be just war theory. According to Rawls’s definition, just war theory is an example of non-ideal theory. This makes sense because, in an ideal world, there would be no war. The fact that there is war means that there is partial compliance of our duties not to engage in aggressive warfare. However, if we look at the actual conduct of war, it seems very clear that there has never been a just war and the gap between principles of just war and the actual conduct of war is very large. It seems unlikely that there ever will be a just war in the foreseeable future. I suspect much confusion within the methodological disputes of political theory stems from the fact that it is not entirely clear what ideal or non-ideal means, and it seems impossible to provide a concrete definition that is both interesting and uncontroversial.

There are several arenas of disagreement between ideal and non-ideal theorists. One of the main sources of disagreement is whether we need an ideal theory before engaging in non-ideal theory. Rawls believed that non-ideal theory needed an ultimate target/ideal, and it was the job of ideal theory to provide that ultimate target. He claimed, “until the ideal is identified ... non-ideal theory lacks an objective, an aim, by reference to which its queries can be answered” (Rawls, 2001, 90). Sen and Gaus have argued that we do not necessarily need an ideal picture of the world to make comparative judgments of justice in the real world and that we should avoid the ‘tyranny’ of a static picture of ideal justice (Sen, 2009 and Gaus, 2016). They disagree with Rawls that an ideal theory provides “the only basis for the systematic grasp of these more pressing problems [that we face today]” (*T&J*, 8). As Sen argues, the “possibility of having an identifiably perfect alternative does not indicate that it is necessary, or indeed useful, to refer to it in judging the relative merits of two alternatives” (Sen, 2009, 102). Another source of contention is whether ideal theorising can hide injustices that are historical or significantly affect the lives of minority groups. A strong version of this charge is made by Charles Mills, who argues that “Ideal theory ... is really an *ideology*, a distortional complex of ideas, values, norms, and beliefs that reflects the

nonrepresentative interests and experiences of a small minority of the national population – middle-to-upper-class white males – who are hugely *over-represented* in the professional philosophical population” (Mills, 2005, 172). Even those who do not go as far as this strong claim argue that “since no racial positions exist in the ideal society, they do not define a standpoint from which to assess racially unjust societies. Hence, ideal theories that make race invisible fail to supply the conceptual framework needed to recognise and understand contemporary racial injustice” (Anderson, 2010, 5).

Regardless of what position people take on these disagreements, there are two things that ideal and non-ideal theorists can agree on. The first is the importance of engaging in non-ideal theorising. It is important to remember that Rawls stated that “obviously the problems of [non-ideal theory] are the pressing and urgent matters. These are the things that we are faced with in everyday life” (*Tol*, 8). No sensible political philosopher would denigrate the need for more non-ideal theorising about pressing problems we are faced with in everyday life. Secondly, everyone agrees about the important role that the social sciences should play in our non-ideal theorising. Swift argues that the role of the social scientist is to identify a set of feasible options, which “requires careful description of existing states of affairs—to judge well where we can realistically hope to get to from here we need to know precisely where we are—and predictions—with probabilities and time scales—about the likely effects of any things we might do, collectively or individually, to change them, which itself presupposes adequate understanding of social mechanisms and causal processes” (Swift, 2008, 370). Anderson argues that to diagnose injustice and respond to current problems properly, her work “integrates research in the social sciences in ways not ordinarily found in works of political philosophy” (Anderson, 2010, 3). Although there is disagreement about the priority and necessity of an ideal theory in the way that Rawls defined it, there is little disagreement about the importance of non-ideal theory and the need for more fact-sensitivity when political theorists provide action-guiding principles in non-ideal circumstances.

1. 2 – Political Moralism versus Political Realism

Until recently, the term ‘political realism’ was not commonly used in contemporary political theory. This is probably because the term has commonly been associated with *realpolitik* and realism as a school of thought in the field of international relations. If

political realism is a form of *realpolitik*, it would suggest that there is very little room for normative theorising (at least in the way that most political theorists engage in normative theorising today).

Contemporary political realists can provide two responses to this conception of political realism. The first is that even in the realm of international relations theory, this description was at best a caricature of what political realists were trying to argue. This is especially the case for the prominent realists that get cited by introductory texts in international relations, such as E. H Carr, Hans Morgenthau, and Reinhold Neibuhr.⁴ The second is that even if this is an accurate depiction of political realism as a school of thought in international relations, it is an inaccurate representation of the political realism that has emerged in contemporary political philosophy. Some of the seminal texts that have emerged under the political realist banner in recent years have rarely mentioned the realists in international relations theory and it is important to note that while they share similar intellectual ancestors (such as Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Hume, and Weber) they have a different conception of what political realism is and what it is trying to do (Geuss, 2008).

We can start to flesh out whom the political realist is arguing against. Williams does not argue directly against 'ideal theory'. Instead, he labels the view he rejects as 'political moralism'. According to Williams, political moralists hold a particular view of the relationship between morality and political practice. Williams mentions two, namely the enactment model and the structural model. What they share is that they start theorising 'outside' of politics or hold that morality is somehow 'prior' to political practice (*IBWD*, 3).

The first model of political theory and political practice is the enactment model. The role of political theory is to formulate the best principles, concepts, ideals, and values. The point of political practice is to express these principles in political action through persuasion, political power, and whatever other means we traditionally associate with the domain of the political. In what way is this model problematic for theorising about

⁴ For example, Carr explicitly recognises that the logic of "pure realism can offer nothing but a naked struggle for power which makes any kind of international society impossible". (Carr, 2001, 87). For more information on in what ways the 'founding figures' of IR realism did not "underwrite moral scepticism or relativism" and that the depiction above is a caricature of their view, see Scheuerman 2013.

politics? Imagine the best conception of utilitarianism. It provides the most plausible conception of utility that ought to be maximised and provides the most sophisticated and comprehensive account of why it is this that ought to be maximised. The problem, however, is that this does not help (or at the very least is insufficient) to guide us under the circumstances of radical disagreement. We might all agree that a set of principles ought to regulate all of our collective behaviour in a political community (Waldron, 1999). This ideal conception of utilitarianism might be a viable candidate for the set of principles we all agree we need. However, we cannot see institutions as merely instruments to achieve these ideals and principles. Even if we all agreed that we ought to be utilitarians (which seems implausible), what the ‘best’ formulation of utility is and how we ought to go about maximising it will inevitably be a significant source of contestation and competition.⁵ Even if you had the ‘correct’ or ‘best’ view of utilitarianism, attempting to implement that conception would generate resentment for some members of the political community who disagree, and if this resentment is substantial enough, it might fail to maintain political order, which is essential for posing any questions of binding morality when interacting with other people.⁶ The traditional arguments against generic forms of utilitarianism (such as the lack of respect for the separateness of persons) also show how the people being ‘used’ might not be so willing to be used to maximise the best conception of utility for the most of people, especially if they disagree. Institutions can act not just as instruments to achieve these ideals, but as mechanisms to reach authoritative decisions under the conditions of disagreement we inevitably see in the domain of the political.

Another model of political theory (and its relationship with political practice) is the ‘structural model’. For Williams, political theory according to this model “lays down moral conditions of coexistence under power, conditions in which power can be justly exercised.” (*IBWD*, 3) This model avoids some of the problems associated with the enactment model. ‘Structural’ political theories tend to respect the separateness of persons (although theories that hold too strong an interpretation of the separateness of persons might also make it difficult to move a political community forward through

⁵ Waldron refers to these as the circumstances of politics. See section 1.3.2 for more details.

⁶ This is not to say that there is no morality under conditions of political instability. However, without a basic level of assurance and political order, moral claims may not be as binding or action-guiding as we would like them to be.

authoritative decisions. A good example of this might be some controversial libertarian theories). They also tend to view institutions not merely as instruments to a more abstract principle or ideal. The existence of an institution might change the answer to what we owe to each other and what people are entitled to (at least with regards to the participants of that institution).

However, when it comes to political argumentation and theorising about politics, the structural model also faces some difficulties. The first is that it places strong moral constraints over the use of political power, constraints that, when invoked in actual political practice, we most likely will be unable to adhere to. The main reason for this is that in order to use power morally, you need to have power in the first place. Moreover, when engaged in politics, there is inevitably a struggle for power that you have to win. Due to the high stakes involved in the struggle for power, there will be agents who will use immoral (or at the very least unsavoury) methods to try and obtain that power. It might be that once we win that struggle for power, we can then stop engaging in unsavoury acts and abide by the moral constraints set out by the structural political theorist. Unfortunately, this vision of the political has too strong a divide between the struggle for power and the use of that power once it is achieved. There is no strong divide between these two activities (Kis, 2008). When one wins the struggle for power and gains access to the levers of power (either from scratch or wrested from another entity), the struggle starts again. Political agents who face this situation, even if properly morally motivated, need to use similar methods that they used in the struggle for power to maintain that power, especially against those who they know would use it to achieve immoral ends.

The structural model of political theory also rejects conceptions of political morality that are ‘political in the wrong way’ or any political order that is a “mere *modus vivendi*”.⁷ This not only “suggests a certain distance from the political”, it also maintains a strong divide between “principle and interest, or morality and prudence, which signifies the continuation of a (Kantian) morality as the framework of the system” (*IBWD*, 2). There are two ways to interpret this claim. The first is regarding the nature

⁷ Horton defines a *modus vivendi* as a situation where a political “arrangement [is] broadly ‘acceptable’ or ‘agreeable’ to those who are party to it, even if only reluctantly and for diverse reasons” (Horton, 2010, 439).

of morality that underlies much analysis of political morality. To a certain extent, political realism does want to engage in a discussion about the way that we make moral claims and what we mean by them. It is fitting that the term that Williams used to argue against these theories is ‘moralism’, which is a term that is not only limited to use in the methodological disputes or even in political philosophy. People have used the term in a lot of different contexts, usually in a pejorative way to describe an overzealous attitude towards morality applied disproportionately to certain situations. It is commonly associated with other vices such as self-righteousness or hypocrisy. Some moral philosophers have dedicated arguments against moralism in moral philosophy, which they define as “a distortion of moral thought, reflection, and judgment about both people and events” (Taylor, 2011, 10).

However, there is a way to interpret this criticism of the structural model that is more directly associated with the claim that it is a poor candidate to help us in political argumentation. The structural model is ‘deficient’ in the sense that it neglects the fact that there are a wide variety of tools we use in politics to reach authoritative decisions. In fact, we can phrase this in a stronger (and potentially more controversial) way, which is that we not only can use these tools to achieve political order, but we have to use these tools in order to ensure that we can achieve political order and act in politically responsible ways. The tools necessary include not only appeal to moral principles but also prudence, ethical concerns, and appeals to interest, without necessarily prioritising one of these types of claims over all others. The structural model, by prioritising morality over prudence, principle over interest, and the right over the good neglects the wide range of methods that any political agent needs to use to reach authoritative collective decisions under the circumstances of politics.

At this point, it is important to note that this clearly shows that the view that political realism is advocating some form of amorality or moral scepticism for politics and reasons of state is a caricature. To claim that political realists want to argue for a vision of the political that avoids any form of moral standard is too crude and should be rejected. Political realists simply reject political moralism, which is to reject “the *basic* relation of morality to politics as **being that represented either by the enactment model or by the structural model**” (IBWD, 8, emphasis mine). When Geuss argues against ‘politics as applied ethics’, he means “a specific view about the nature and

structure of ethical judgment and its relation to politics, and in particular a theory about where one should *start* in studying politics, what the final framework for studying politics is, what it is reasonable to focus on, and what is possible to abstract from” (Geuss, 2008, 6). Galston argues that one thing that unites political realists of different stripes is the “belief that high liberalism represents a desire to evade, displace, or escape from politics” (Galston, 2010, 386). Sleat argues that “political theorists have in recent years too often treated politics as if it were merely a form of ‘applied ethics’ or ‘a branch of moral philosophy’ and in doing so have conceived of politics as little more than the instrument for the application and realisation of some antecedent moral values, principles, or ideals. The result has been to lose sight of too much of what is specific, unique, and indeed valuable about politics” (Sleat, 2018, 3). Finally, Honig argues that political theorists try to ‘displace’ the political. She claims moralists “confine politics ... to the juridical, administrative or regulative tasks of stabilising moral and political subjects, building consensus, maintaining agreements, or consolidating communities and identities. They assume that the task of political theory is to resolve institutional questions, to get politics right, over, and done with, to free modern subjects and their sets of arrangements [from] political conflict and instability” (Honig, 1993, 2).

What these theorists have in common is that they argue that there is something about politics that political moralists neglect and it is the task of the political realist to give “greater autonomy to distinctively political thought” (*IBWD*, 2-3). Rossi and Sleat argue that the “defining feature” of political realism is “the attempt to give autonomy to political normativity and political theorising through a fuller understanding of the sources of normativity in politics” (Rossi and Sleat, 2014, 690). When it comes to theorising about politics, we cannot start from ‘outside’ politics (either by seeing the political as a means of applying principles derived in political theory or seeing principles of political theory acting as moral constraints on the political and the use of political power); instead we need to start theorising from ‘within’ politics.

1. 3 - The Political Realist Case for a Distinctively Political Normativity

Before I set out the political realist case for giving autonomy to political normativity, I want to set out some conditions that this distinctively political normativity will have to meet. The first is that a plausible and distinctive account of political normativity should

not misrepresent or provide a strawman account of moral normativity. I refer to this as the *charitability condition*. To see what this condition requires, let me use a case from Janos Kis, which he refers to as *Two Princes*.

Two Princes - “Two Italian princes, called Balducci and d’Agostino, rule in adjacent realms. Their military and economic might are roughly equal. Because of the weather, the opportunity for them to wage war against each other is limited to the summer months. They must either invade the neighbouring country in June or give up hope of occupying it in that year. Of course, both d’Agostino and Balducci may decide not to attack their neighbour. If so, neither will be in a position to annex the neighbouring realm to his own, but nor will either lose his principality ... A second possibility is for d’Agostino to mobilise his troops and attack, while Balducci fails to mobilise; d’Agostino wins, forces his rival into exile and annexes his country. Third, the same thing can happen with the roles reverse... Fourth, when June arrives both princes attack; the war is fought at the border, and each side causes serious losses to the other, without conquering any territory”. We know that Balducci “continues to lack any moral qualms” while d’Agostino is “a good man who believes that his highest responsibility is to secure peace and happiness for his people” (Kis, 2008, 44-45).

In the *Two Princes* case, a political realist might be tempted to argue that there is a unique political normativity because d’Agostino should do something that ‘ordinary morality’ and his conviction say that he should not, namely be violent. However, this seems problematic because it sets out an account of moral normativity that is limited to making universal deontic constraints with no regard for context and proportionality. Most plausible accounts of deontology would not say that people should not be violent regardless of the circumstances and consequences. Consequentialists would definitely not make a claim like this. In other words, the political realist who makes a claim like the one at the beginning of this paragraph would succeed in establishing a distinctive political normativity only by maintaining an uncharitable account of moral normativity. The success of this form of political realism implies that we would not consider classic texts of moral philosophy, such as Jeff McMahan’s *The Ethics of Killing*, as an example of moral normativity, which would be implausible. For anyone who believes that there is

a distinctive political normativity, they should want to avoid this outcome as it would be a hollow victory. Both political realists and moralists could accept that it is very difficult “to delineate the boundaries of the moral” (Estlund, 2017, 385). My aim in this thesis is not to provide clear boundaries. Not only would that be very difficult, it would also add much more controversy than is necessary for my argument. However, I believe most reasonable people would agree that the boundary set between moral and political normativity in the reaction to the *Two Princes* case I described above is not a plausible one. Estlund argues that “if someone claims to have arguments that normative standards for appropriate politics are not moral standards, they owe us enough of an account of the nature of the moral for us to understand what it is that they mean” (Estlund, 2017, 388). The standard provided by the political realist needs to meet the *charitability condition*, which means that the boundaries drawn between the moral and the political should be done in a way that is clear and generous to both the moral and the political.

Another condition that political realists should meet is what I refer to as the *inappropriate externalism condition*. What I mean by this is that it is not enough to claim that there is a normativity internal to politics. A political moralist could accept that there is something unique about the domain of the political. Political philosophy should not just be moral theories applied to the domain of politics. For political realism to be successful, they need to show that there is something inappropriate about applying an external normativity to this distinctive political domain which is a more ambitious goal. We can use an example to clarify this condition and why it is so ambitious. Imagine a political realist who argued that political realism is about advocating a role ethic for political agents. Anyone who takes on the role of a political agent, particularly someone who has access to the levers of power, has a distinct set of responsibilities that a non-political agent would not have. A doctor has a set of responsibilities that a non-doctor does not. The Hippocratic Oath is a classic example of this distinct set of responsibilities. Political moralists do not deny the existence of these role ethics. They generally accept that once someone accepts a particular role, the unique features and goals of that role provide them with a unique set of responsibilities. However, it is a different claim to argue that we cannot apply a more general moral theory to evaluate that particular role ethic and what that role ethic demands. For example, if we imagine that consequentialism is true, why can't/shouldn't we say that the idea of 'doing no harm' is the wrong thing to do if

doing some harm to one patient will in fact generate the best consequences for many more people?⁸ For the political realist critique to be successful, they have to make this further claim. The mere existence of a normativity internal to politics is not enough for the political realist position and the political realist critique. Political moralists could accept that it exists. Political realists have to make the further claim that political normativity is not just a subset of moral normativity, and it is inappropriate to apply an external moral normativity to it. This is what I refer to as the *inappropriate externalism condition*.⁹

1. 3. 1 – *What is Politics?*

To give greater autonomy to the domain of politics, we have to understand what politics is. It is surprisingly difficult to answer the questions ‘what is politics?’ and ‘what is political?’ These questions are the subject of many ‘Introduction to Politics’ modules in politics departments around the world, and it seems unlikely that we will be able to provide a definition of the ‘political’ that incorporates all the different aspects of this complex human activity and is uncontroversial enough for practitioners and theoreticians of politics to agree upon. Williams acknowledges this difficulty when he states that he is “certainly not going to offer a definition or any general characterisation of the political. That would ... be impossible” (*IBWD*, 77). While I agree that giving a comprehensive, clear, and uncontroversial definition of the political is impossible, it makes it difficult to know what political realists are advocating when they say that political philosophy ought to take ‘real politics’ seriously. Political realists argue that politics is a solution to a problem (Jubb, 2017, 115). This is a good place to start. We can divide this section into two parts. The first will describe the problem that politics needs to solve. The second will discuss what it means to be a solution to that problem. I mentioned in the previous chapter that the main problem that politics is trying to solve

⁸ A consequentialist might say that consequentialism itself would not say that because if it were true that doctors should harm one patient to save five (and they abided by their duty to harm do so), no one would go to the doctor. The point however is that this debate seems like a debate that we can have in in moral philosophy.

⁹ There are of course other conditions, such as logical consistency, that apply to the political realist belief that there is a distinctive political normativity. However, these conditions presumably would apply to everyone who is making a normative and methodological claim. I believe these two are particularly important for the success of the political realist project and critique.

is what Williams referred to as the First Political Question. I will provide a more comprehensive analysis of this problem here.

1. 3. 2 - The Problem: What Makes Politics Possible and Necessary?

What is the problem that politics is trying to solve? Waldron provides one prominent account of the problem, which he refers to as the ‘circumstances of politics’. Like the circumstances of justice, there are two circumstances of politics. The first is “the felt need among members of a certain group for a common framework or decision or course of action on some matter” (Waldron, 1999, 102). The second is a significant level of “disagreement about what that framework, decision or action should be” (Waldron, 1999, 102). The circumstances of politics are aspects of the human condition which make the practice of politics both possible and necessary. “Disagreement would not matter if there did not need to be a concerted course of action; and the need for a common course of action would not give rise to politics as we know it if there was not at least the potential for disagreement about what the concerted course of action should be” (Waldron, 1999, 102-103).

Williams offers a similar account of the problem. He states that politics arises because of the ‘First Political Question’, which is about “the securing of order, protection, safety, trust, and the conditions of cooperation” (*IBWD*, 3). The question can be put in Hobbesian terms, namely how can we act to solve the problem of order when the level of disagreement that we see in the real world can easily lead to conflict?¹⁰ Politics is needed to solve the problem of order caused by our propensity to disagree. And if groups “do not attempt to answer the First Political Question for themselves and their members” they do not have politics (Jubb, 2017, 114). Because Williams’s conception of politics is inspired by Hobbes’s conception of politics, we can start with an analysis of Hobbes’s account of politics. Hobbes introduces several features of our social world that can cause conflict, including competition for scarce resources, equality, and glory-seeking individuals (*Leviathan*, 1, 13, 62). Egoistic and short-sighted individuals will inevitably face a difficult time establishing order, as individuals will defect from

¹⁰ By ‘we’ I do not mean an all-inclusive collective act. It is a group act because it is impossible for any single individual to establish order in a polity. However, there will inevitably be some people who solve the problem by establishing an authority over others.

cooperative arrangements for short-term individual gain, even when doing so undermines the long-term collective interest.

These are all important features of the problem that politics is trying to solve. There are people who hold unreasonable views about what is morally right or permissible. There are people who are not morally motivated even if they did not hold unreasonable views about what is morally right. At this stage, someone might respond by stating that Hobbes's conception of human nature is itself unrealistic. There is much empirical evidence to suggest that, even under circumstances where there is no centralised authority, people can establish social norms and conventions that people abide by (Ellickson, 1994; Bicchieri, 2006). There is also a lot of evidence that human beings generally are social creatures who are not merely egoistic but also motivated by concepts like fairness and reciprocity (Binmore, 2005; Fehr, Fischbacher, and Gächter, 2002). Humans are not angels, but they are also not the egoists that Hobbes sometimes suggests they are.

However, to rely on this empirical evidence to try and undermine Hobbes's argument (and political realists who rely on Hobbes's analysis) would be missing the point. Violence and selfishness are not the only features of the state of nature that makes life brutish and short. There are two main causes of conflict that do not rely on the selfishness of humanity. Firstly, conflict can emerge from people who are motivated by 'moral' reasons.¹¹ Hobbes understands that rational people do aim for what he refers to as 'right reason', which is the exercise of true rationality that reveals the truth. However, "because everyone's exercise of rationality is fallible, we often disagree about what is right reason; the private use of reason leads to disagreement and, thought Hobbes, conflict" (Gaus, 2013, 161). We see these cases in real life. Take the controversial issue of abortion. There have been many instances of violence against abortion clinics. Rather than seeing these instances as attempts to maximise personal gain, it seems more plausible to view them as instances of religious conviction taken to its extremes. These individuals are clearly unreasonable from a moral point of view. However, to tell them that they are acting in morally unreasonable and impermissible ways would do little to

¹¹ Hobbes's rarely discussed third book of the *Leviathan* 'Of a Christian Commonwealth' is all about the relationship between religion, religious morality, and politics. He is very much aware of religion and its ability to get people to disobey the commands of the sovereign.

change their behaviour, because they do not recognise the authority of that moral standard. Instead, they appeal to the authority of a different standard of morality; in this case, a standard derived from the interpretation of religious texts. Rossi and Sleat argue that “If ethics could effectively regulate behaviour in political communities ... we would not require politics. We need politics in part precisely because of the ubiquity of moral disagreements about what we collectively should do, the ends to which political power should be put, and the moral principles and values that should underpin and regulate our shared political association. As such, politics cannot be a domain that is straightforwardly regulated by morality” (Rossi and Sleat, 2014, 691). As we shall see later, this is one of the ways that political realists try to establish a distinctively political normativity.

The second is that the lack of certainty and assurance makes interaction and coordination of collective action difficult, even for those who are not purely egoistic (*Leviathan*, 1, 13, 62). This lack of assurance can play several roles. It makes any comprehensive long-term planning impossible, which makes the pursuit of flourishing (regardless of your conception of flourishing) impossible. Why bother investing my time and energy farming a plot of land when I am not sure if I can reap the fruits of my labour? The lack of assurance also makes any kind of collective and cooperative action quite limited in scale. The evidence I mentioned before discussed cases that were relatively small in scale. Communities not only make it easier to develop certain forms of solidarity, it is also easier to verify forms of defection and punish defectors, which is one of the main mechanisms of norm enforcement (Panchanathan and Boyd, 2003). As detection becomes harder, the incentive to act in ways that go against the collective interest increase as well. We now live in political communities much larger than the farmer communities that Ellickson studied, which means there is a limit to how much order norms and conventions can generate on their own.¹²

It can be argued under conditions of no assurance that people will act morally, people are incentivised and (in some cases) permitted to act in ways that go against what

¹² Nor is the solution to this lack of assurance as simple as ‘we should live in small communities’. This lack of assurance would also mean that there is a lack of certainty among communities as well. Do I know for sure that my community will not be attacked by a neighbouring community? How can I trade with neighbouring collectives if I do not have any assurance mechanism for them to honour their side of the contract?

morality demands. Hobbes argued that while the laws of nature were always precepts of reason both in and out of the state of nature, in the state of nature they were only binding *in foro interno*, which meant that we ought to desire peace in our conscience, but the laws were not binding on our behaviour (*Leviathan*, 1, 14, 79). For example, it would be strange for morality to demand that you ought to lay down your arms and seek peace when it is certain that your opponent will not comply. In this case, morality seems to be demanding that you sacrifice yourself. There may be cases where this is plausible even if it is demanding; demandingness alone might be insufficient to reject the obligation completely. If the consequences of living were dire enough (if you can save a million people by sacrificing yourself), it is plausible to believe that morality requires you to sacrifice your own life. However, not only is it excessively demanding for morality to require self-sacrifice, it makes you a victim of unfair treatment, benefits the wrong doer, and incentivises more individuals to act in similar ways.

At this point, we can start to flesh out exactly what Williams means by the 'First' Political Question. Williams states that the First Political Question is first because authoritative order is a necessary condition for solving or posing any other question (*IBWD*, 3). The idea that a solution to the First Political Question is a necessary condition for posing any other question sounds *prima facie* implausible. Surely, we can ask questions of morality, permissibility and obligation, even under conditions of the state of nature. Even Hobbes believed that the laws of nature existed in the state of nature, in the sense that they were the products of reason and not the products of the absolute sovereign. However, this would be taking the claim too literally. Based on this Hobbesian analysis, there are several ways to interpret this claim more plausibly. Without some form of centralised authority, there will always be violence or the threat of violence. This violence will make any form of meaningful collective action impossible, which makes the achievement of any other political value impossible. Finally, it would be nearly impossible for individuals to flourish (regardless of their conception of flourishing) unless an agent or entity can manage the level of disagreement in order to establish order and the conditions of trust. This is one of the ways Williams believes that the First Political Question is 'first'. It relies on the Hobbesian idea that any substantial and sustained collective action is impossible, which makes the achievement of most forms of flourishing impossible.

Williams argues that the First Political Question is *always* first because political institutions can decay in the long run. If not properly designed, there are always opportunities for corruption, and the loss of faith in the successful function of those institutions may follow. Even institutions that are perceived to be consolidated can fall suddenly. Because of the level of disagreement we see in the real world, we always need to remember that the successful achievement of order is a difficult task and one that we need to keep in mind constantly even when the perceived risk of institutional failure is low. In Hobbesian terms, there is always a chance (regardless of how small it might be) that we can return to the state of nature. Any agent or entity that answers the First Political Question by establishing order always needs to provide an answer to the question before moving onto any other question.

To summarise, politics emerges as a solution to a problem. The problem is partly caused by the existence of morally unreasonable people who will act in selfish and morally unjustifiable ways. People who are ‘morally’ motivated are also part of the problem as they adhere to competing conceptions of morality that can cause conflict. The lack of assurance can generate incentives not to cooperate and can even make non-cooperation morally permissible. All these features lead to violence, chaos, and disorder, which makes any form of collective action impossible. The circumstances of politics, namely the need for collective action in the face of radical disagreement, make politics both possible and necessary. Any agent who wants to answer the First Political Question needs to provide a solution to this violence, chaos, and disorder.

1. 3. 3 - How Does Politics Act as a Solution?

There is a lot more that can be said about the problem that politics is meant to solve. It would be impossible to give a comprehensive analysis of all the causes of conflict that might exist. However, hopefully, this should be sufficient to show the magnitude of the problem. It is a situation of radical disagreement about morality and ethics, lack of certainty and coordination, and the existence of unreasonable people. We can now move on to the ‘solution’ element of politics. Politics is meant to be a solution to the First Political Question. This means that a situation might be ‘political’ if someone provides the conditions of “order, protection, safety, trust, and the conditions of cooperation” (*IBWD*, 3). We can now start to flesh out what it means for politics to be a solution to the problem I have just described. We can again divide this section into

two parts. The first section will quickly discuss how politics can solve the problem and the second section will discuss what conditions an answer to the First Political Question must meet in order for it to be considered a situation of politics, rather than a situation of internal strife, warfare, or domination.

Regarding the means to answer the question, there is only one solution available to us. The struggle for power has always been associated with politics, and one of the main reasons for this is that it is the only means we have at our disposal to solve the First Political Question. Rochau, a German journalist and liberal activist who coined the term *realpolitik*, argued that “the law of the strong is the determining factor in politics ... sovereignty is not a natural right (for ‘the people’ or the king) but a reflection of power” (Bew, 2016, 32). Authority needs to be backed by some form of power to coerce those who disagree with the sovereign. The circumstances of politics state that we want to be able to coordinate our behaviour. However, any agent who claimed that everyone ought to abide by the framework they advocate will inevitably face disagreement from people who disagree for moral or self-interested reasons. There are of course many ways to respond to those who disagree. However, without the power to coerce those who disagree even after all other methods have been used, there ultimately cannot be a sustainable answer to the First Political Question.

The struggle for power is important in politics because it is a fundamental truth of politics that “no one rules alone; no one has absolute authority” (Mesquita and Smith, 2011, 25). It might be true that in very small societies, one individual might have the charisma, or the physical strength, to maintain order. However, in most cases, individuals cannot rule alone. As Hobbes said, “nature hath made men so equall, in the faculties of body, and mind ... the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others” (*Leviathan*, 1, 13, 60). The basic equality of human nature makes it difficult for one individual to maintain order in the face of disagreement. Furthermore, once the group becomes large enough, it becomes difficult for any single individual to be charismatic or strong enough to maintain order in the face of disagreement. In order to have power in these circumstances, an agent needs to gain the support of others.

The force of moral argumentation is one of the most explicit instruments available to us in the struggle for power. We see this regularly in politics today, from accusations of

vices like hypocrisy, protests, demands for apologies, and the condemnation of immoral behaviour. Groups emerge due to shared principles and ideals all the time. However, it is important to note that there are many instruments that can be used to win the struggle for power, and any agent who wants to do so will usually need to use a wide variety of these instruments to establish coalitions to succeed. Even if their arguments are much more plausible and coherent than rival arguments made by opponents in the struggle for power, due to the radical level of disagreement that politics exists to manage there will always be people who disagree with those arguments. Because of the high stakes, some agents will inevitably be willing to use means that go against common sense moral principles to gain an edge in the struggle for power. Political agents need to be willing to take advantage of some of these means in order to achieve moral ends. A classic example of this is negative advertising against opponents. It might be better for each politician, and for the health of the democratic process if candidates refrained from negative advertising and focused on making arguments based on reason for their normative ideals and policy positions. However, an immoral agent with immoral ends engages in negative advertising against their rivals to gain an edge in the democratic process. Moral agents who want to prevent this immoral agent from winning the struggle for power, need to be willing to engage in similar forms of advertising to negate this advantage and prevent the immoral agent from gathering enough support for their cause. Political agents need to build coalitions through a wider variety of means. As Kis argues “A politician of good intentions but of little talent for the strategy of conflict is not a good politician; a good politician has considerable capacities to win allies for his cause and to neutralise his enemies, to make good bargains, to use the means of threat effectively, and to reveal or to conceal his aims depending on the necessities of the political game” (Kis, 2008, 28-9).

We can now discuss what conditions need to be met by an answer to the First Political Question.

Tyrant – Imagine a ruthless dictator managed to obtain a monopoly of violence within a specific political community. Any form of dissent from the will of this dictator is repressed quickly and mercilessly. All forms of information and education that exists in this community are geared towards ‘brainwashing’ individuals to believe that the dictator does in fact have the right to rule over

their community (because it is 'natural' for them to do so, or that it is God's will that they do so).

In the *Tyrant* case, it seems like the First Political Question has been solved. One agent has the monopoly of violence, preventing any other agent from getting enough power to plunge the community back into a state of war. Some of the main causes of conflict that could threaten this arrangement have also been dealt with through an extensive brainwashing programme that removes the urge that people might have to dissent from this regime. Any political liberties, such as freedom of speech and association, are not protected, as these types of activities would only increase the likelihood of generating opposition to this regime.

However, it is important to note that political realists do not believe that the *Tyrant* case is even a political situation. It has the necessary features of a political situation in the sense that "groups that do not attempt to answer the First Political Question for themselves and their members do not have politics" (Jubb, 2017, 114). However, they also argue that "If order is not being created out of division in a way that in some sense at least hopes to avert recognisably Hobbesian bads, politics is simply not going on." (Jubb, 2017, 114). Williams states that the "situation of one lot of people terrorising another lot of people is not per se a political situation; it is rather the situation which the existence of the political is in the first place supposed to alleviate" (*IBWD*, 5). He also states that "if the power of one lot of people over another is to represent a solution to the first political question, and not itself be part of the problem, *something* has to be said to explain (to the less empowered, to concerned bystanders, to children being educated in this structure, etc.) what the difference is between the solution and the problem, and that cannot simply be an account of successful domination" (*IBWD*, 5). The *Tyrant* case is a situation where one group of people (the dictator and their army) is terrorising their citizens. If politics and political action is meant to be a solution to a set of Hobbesian bads, it would not really be a solution if it replaced a set of Hobbesian bads generated by one set of affairs (anarchy) with another set of Hobbesian bads generated by another set of affairs (despotism). Establishing order is a necessary condition of politics, but it is not a sufficient one. Coercion is a necessary part of establishing order from the problems I discussed in the 'problem' aspect of politics. However, it cannot be the only means used. Politics as a solution tries to walk a line

between these two extremes; on the one hand, a decentralised state of war, on the other a centralised authoritarianism.

Political realists argue that it is an axiom of politics that might does not make right. There is a distinction between politics and sheer domination, and it is from this distinction that political realists derive their account of normativity that is internal to the very concept of politics. As Sleat argues “there is something special about political rule, as distinct from rule as domination, which requires rulers to offer a legitimisation story to those over whom they claim authority. This is a normative standard internal to politics” (Sleat, 2013, 117). Many political realists cite Williams’s Basic Legitimation Demand as the basis of a distinctively political normativity. It is an account of legitimacy, which is the normative relative of power/might. As mentioned before, for a solution to the first political question to be genuinely political, something needs to be said by the authority who claims to have answered the first political question to show that their solution is not part of the problem. This ‘something that needs to be said’ is the Basic Legitimation Demand (BLD). It is a normative demand that emerges from the concept of politics. Political realists argue that politics is a thick concept. A thick concept is one that is ‘world guided’ in the sense that their application “is determined by what the world is like” and is action-guiding in the sense that if “a concept of this kind applies, this often provides someone with a reason for action” (*ELP*, 129 and 140). As Jubb argues “some justification of claims to political authority is offered to all those who are subject to it.” (Jubb, 2017, 114). The Basic Legitimation Demand is “best understood, in the first instance, as a way of delineating when politics, as opposed to mere warfare, is actually happening. In the case of warfare, one group (or groups) merely asserts power over another (or others) without giving reasons to those others, in terms that they are expected to accept, as to why they ought to consider that power as rightful ... By contrast, when one group gives reasons in the expectation that the subordinated group ought to accept the power of the subordinating group as rightful, then politics has begun: the dominated group makes the [Basic Legitimation Demand], and the dominators offer some kind of answer to it.” (Sagar, 2018, 117). As Sagar argues “in order for the given form of politics to be deemed *legitimate*, the answer to the [Basic Legitimation Demand] will have to be found *acceptable* by those to whom it is offered” (Sagar, 2018, 117). Sleat argues that this is “the truth in Hume’s remark that it is ‘on opinion only that government is founded’; while governments will need to employ force

in order to rule, it cannot rule through force alone” (Sleat, 2016a, 32). An entity that establishes order needs to be at least partially legitimate in the eyes of the population it is ruling over, or else it will (most likely) be unable to sustain the order in the long run.

Williams believes that “we cannot say that it is either a necessary or sufficient condition of there being a (genuine) demand for justification, that someone demands one” (*IBWD*, 6). Remember that when we are dealing with politics, we are dealing with radical disagreement and power. As Sagar explains “it is not *sufficient* because anyone can raise a demand based on a grievance, no matter how spurious, and the mere fact that some people don’t accept an answer to the [Basic Legitimation Demand] is not sufficient to show that the answer is therefore inadequate because those unsatisfied may be ‘anarchists, or utterly unreasonable, or bandits, or merely enemies’” (Sagar, 2018, 117). This suggests that satisfying the Basic Legitimation Demand is not an ‘all-or-nothing’ verdict “but will instead be scalar, with judgment required as to whether the state in question can reasonably be said to be legitimate overall” (Sagar, 2018, 117). It is the ‘scalarness’ of the Basic Legitimation Demand that leads political realists to argue that “not every conflict can be resolved, nor every difference settled; domination is a recurrent element in most political systems, and while some cases are evidence of political failure, it also can be evidence of the intractability of the problems faced” (Philp, 2007, 62). States that are generally considered legitimate will typically engage in “the domination of some subordinated groups” (Sagar, 2018, 117).

The previous paragraph discussed why Williams did not believe it was a sufficient condition of there being a genuine demand for legitimation that someone demands one, because under circumstances of radical disagreement and with the existence of unreasonable people, there will always be people who make spurious demands. However, it is important to note that Williams also stated that it is not a necessary condition either. It is here that Williams draws other principles from the concept of politics and his belief in the axiom of politics that might is not right. Williams argues that another principle that is internal to politics is the Critical Theory Principle, which states that “the acceptance of a justification does not count if the acceptance has been produced by the coercive power which is supposedly being justified” (*IBWD*, 6). It is this principle that explains why he does not believe it is a necessary condition of there being a genuine demand for legitimation that someone demands one, because people

can be “drilled by coercive power itself into accepting its exercise” (*IBWD*, 6). We can return to the *Tyrant* case. In this case, no citizen demands a genuine legitimation story because they have been brainwashed by the coercive powers available to the tyrant to believe that the state is legitimate. We can use the Critical Theory Principle in the *Tyrant* case to explain why the tyrant is not a political authority, even though no one in their state is complaining or demanding a legitimation story.¹³

Williams asks whether the Basic Legitimation Demand is a moral principle. If it were, that would show that political normativity is ultimately a subset of moral normativity. He argues that if the Basic Legitimation Demand is a moral principle, it does not “represent a morality which is prior to politics” because “it is a claim that is inherent in there being such a thing as politics: in particular, because it is inherent in there being such a thing as politics” (*IBWD*, 5).¹⁴

It is impossible to provide a full definition and account of what politics is. However, what I’ve discussed so far can be considered a threshold for understanding politics. Philp provides the best summary of this section when he states “a theory that does not acknowledge the lines of conflict between social groups, the need for coordination, the threat from individual self-government, the potential abuse of power by the state, and that has no conception of the potential subversion of sovereignty from within or without will have no sense of the need for political rule and will have no standard by which to assess its exercise ... We can see why it is this ‘game’ that needs to be played, and we get a sense of its point or purpose – that it attempts to end disorder and domination, to permit collective action, and to resolve conflict in a way that is not simply a case of one side winning” (Philp, 2007, 67-8).

¹³ It can be difficult for theorists to use the Critical Theory Principle in less stark cases than *Tyrant*. Williams understands that power will always be present in the creation of beliefs for socially and politically embedded subjects. This does not mean that all forms of power are normatively objectionable. Williams believes that the best way to see if an authority is legitimate based on the Critical Theory Principle is to apply a ‘critical theory test’, which begins by asking of a belief held by a group “if they were to understand properly how they came to hold this belief, would they give it up?” (Williams, 2002, 224). My focus on this chapter is geared more towards the general idea of a normativity internal to politics, which means that going deeper into whether the critical theory test is a good test is beyond its scope.

¹⁴ Whether this is a good answer to the question ‘is the BLD a moral principle?’ and whether it adequately deals with the implications of that question, I will discuss later when I start to reject this idea of a distinctively political normativity.

Finally, while this is outside the scope of this chapter, I want to mention another source of reasons for why political realists believe that there is a normativity that is internal to politics that is distinct from moral normativity. Political realists are not nihilists when it comes to morality, in the sense that they do not deny that morality exists or hold that it is unintelligible to say that someone can make moral claims or give moral reasons and justifications. However, they generally are sceptical about the universality of most moral claims; our moral frameworks are for us here and now as they are the outcome of a particular history. As Geuss famously argues “ethics is usually dead politics: the hand of a victor in some past conflict reaching out to try to extend its grip to the present and the future” (Geuss, 2009, 42). Sleat makes a more moderate claim about the relationship between ethics and politics when he argues that “politics cannot be ‘applied ethics’ because our moral frameworks and discourses have a history, at least part of which is going to be political. And so morality does not ground politics because morality is itself partly the result of past politics and political battles” (Sleat, 2018, 17). How can we evaluate politics from the perspective of morality if morality itself was the outcome of previous political battles? We should also be somewhat sceptical about universal moral claims because ‘what has won political battles’ is not a good or reliable way of tracking moral truths. Williams shares a similar stance when he states that political moralists have “no answer in its own terms to the question of why what it takes to be the true moral solution to the questions of politics, liberalism, should for the first time (roughly) become evident in European culture from the late seventeenth century onward, and why these truths have been concealed from other people. Moralistic liberalism cannot plausibly explain, adequately to its moral pretensions, why, when, and by whom it has been accepted and rejected.” (*IBWD*, 9). I refer to this type of scepticism as the Historicist Scepticism claim, and it plays a significant role in the political realist position. It explains why we should think of political legitimacy in the way that they do and why the way moralists think of political legitimacy is problematic. I provide a much more comprehensive account of the claim in the last chapter of the thesis.

We can now summarise the arguments that political realists make for a normativity that is internal to politics. Political realists believe that politics is a solution to a particular problem, which means we have to remember the important constitutive features of the problem and the solution when engaging in ‘political’ theory. Politics is a solution to the problem of order, which means we have to remember the constitutive features of the

problem of order, and the tools we need to use to establish order. Political realists also believe that politics is a thick concept. The distinction between politics/political authority and sheer domination, which share the descriptive aspect of politics but not the evaluative, is where political realists believe the normativity can be found. There is a separate political normativity because we need politics to resolve disputes and establish order; if morality could resolve these disputes, there would be no need for politics. However, because morality can actually be a cause of these disputes, we cannot ‘straightforwardly’ regulate the process of establishing order with morality; we cannot simply apply moral theory to politics. Finally, if the BLD is considered to be a moral principle, that is not necessarily problematic for the political realist because political realists do not reject morality. What they reject is the morality that is ‘prior’ to politics, which is best represented by the enactment and structural models of political theory. If it is a moral principle, the BLD is not one that is ‘prior’ to politics.

1. 4 – Political Realism versus Non-Ideal Theory

I do not believe that the idea of a normativity that is internal to politics will ultimately be successful. The aim of the next chapter is to show why I believe the main argumentative strategies used by political realists to establish this distinctive normativity is implausible. However, we should recognise that this idea plays a significant role in distinguishing between non-ideal theory and political realism. When political realists accuse political theory of being “too detached from the real world of politics” (Sleat, 2016a, 27), it seems that there might be a lot of common concerns between the non-ideal theorist and the political realist. Philosophers who are sympathetic to more non-ideal forms of theorising such as Colin Farrelly, Elizabeth Anderson, and Amartya Sen, have argued that political philosophy is too abstract, too ‘transcendental’, and too idealised to provide us with action-guiding moral principles that are applicable to the real world (Anderson, 2010 and Sen, 2009). It seems that non-ideal theorists would agree with political realists and say that ideal theories are too ‘unrealistic’.

However, according to political realists, to conflate these two positions would be a mistake. The best way to see the difference between non-ideal theory and political realism is to consider the focal point of disagreement between non-ideal theory/political realism and more orthodox forms of political theorising. We can start by making a

distinction between two different types of ‘realism’. The first type of realism I will refer to as ‘common-sense realism’. It is what we normally mean when we say that something is ‘unrealistic’. The main complaint of common sense realism is best encapsulated by the common saying ‘that works in theory but not in practice’. The solution for those who hold the common-sense realist view/critique is that political realists need to engage with social science literature a lot more than we currently do (or, at least, be less abstract and make fewer ‘unrealistic’ idealisations). Finally, much discussion has surrounded the nature of justice and to what extent it should be sensitive to facts. Some have argued that when theorising about justice, we should be more fact-sensitive in order to make justice more ‘realistic’ (from a common-sense realism perspective), while others have argued that theorising about justice (at least at the ultimate level) ought to be completely fact-insensitive (Farrelly, 2007 and Cohen, 2008).

The social sciences are considered a source of information that is required for political philosophers to engage in forms of normative theorising that can consider issues of feasibility and not just desirability. We can use this evidence to start to construct ‘feasibility frontiers’, which identify the outer limits of what is achievable and create indifference curves of people’s responses to trade-offs across values (Hamlin and Stemplowska, 2012, 54). We can also use social scientific data about currently existing institutions to provide us with much more concrete normative recommendations of how we can transition from the status quo to a more ideal situation (concrete public policy can also be more rhetorically persuasive for political agents). By including more social scientific analysis, political theory can guide action and practice in a way that more abstract and idealised forms of political theory cannot.

The focal point of dispute for the political realist is the appropriate conception of politics. The enactment model and the structural model has a flawed conception of politics. They do not recognise that politics is about “ineradicable conflict and is hence a site of perpetual struggle for power and dominance” (Sleat, 2016a, 31). They do not recognise that politics is a “distinct sphere of human activity – one which addresses its own unique set of concerns regarding the first political question and through the employment of a distinctive set of means (e.g. power, legitimation, authority)” (Sleat, 2016a, 32). When theorising about how to respond and manage disagreement, we need to engage with what is “platitudinously politics” (*IBWD*, 13). Some of this will engage

with the social scientific literature.¹⁵ However, if the non-ideal theorist theorises about justice and then attempts to theorise about politics in a way that resembles either the enactment model or the structural model, the political realist critique will also apply to the resultant non-ideal theory, even if it is much less abstract and idealised.

1. 5 – Conclusion

Galston referred to the charter members of political realism as a ‘rag tag band’ because they worked on many different topics and held a wide variety of views. However, as this chapter showed, they share a desire in ‘rediscovering’ politics in political philosophy. Given that politics is a “complex sphere of human activity”, the ‘rag-tag’ nature of political realist’s charter members views should be understandable. Appropriately understanding the ‘realities of politics’ can be open to interpretation and disagreement, and “these disagreements explain why realism is best conceived not as an homogeneous theoretical perspective on politics – even less a substantive political position within politics – but as a family of different approaches to how we ought to understand, theorise, and normatively assess politics” (Sleat, 2018, 2). This chapter played two major roles in this thesis. The first was to set up political realism as a position in the methodological disputes of political theory. It discussed what ideal theory is, how ideal theorists think of non-ideal theory, and some of the main things non-ideal theorists find problematic about ideal theories of justice.

I then considered a parallel debate between political realists and what they refer to as political moralism. I discussed what Williams believed to be the two main models of political moralism, namely the enactment model and the structural model. What they have in common is they hold the ‘moral prior to the political’. Political realists want to give autonomy to distinctively political thought. I showed what this means, by focusing on what problem politics is meant to solve, and by showing how it is meant to ‘genuinely’ solve it. The problem that politics tries to deal with is the many causes of conflict, including (but not limited to) individuals acting in self-interested ways, a lack of assurance, and moral disagreement. The solution is to gain power and use it to establish order. However, not any order is a ‘genuine’ solution to the problem. If a tyrant

¹⁵ I do not want to argue that there are no similarities or affinities between the non-ideal theorist and the political realist.

establishes order and uses their power to dominate individuals into submission, they have (according to political realists) simply replaced one set of Hobbesian bads with another set of Hobbesian bads. It is an axiom of politics that might is not right, and something needs to be said by the authority who answered the first political question that their solution is not part of the problem. This ‘something that needs to be said’, political realists refer to it as the Basic Legitimation Demand. Political realists argue that this idea of a ‘genuine’ solution to a problem that emerges from within the concept or constitutive features of politics itself is what generates a normativity that is internal to politics. If morality or ethics could actually regulate disagreements without the use of power, we would not need politics. Because they cannot, we should not see the regulation of disagreement and the maintenance of order from a purely moral perspective.

The Basic Legitimation Demand is one of the main sources of a normativity that is internal to politics, and this normativity is what makes political realism unique in the methodological disputes of political theory. A distinctively political normativity plays a major role in the political realist position. However, have political realists made enough of a case for this normativity? Have they done so in a way that meets the *charitability condition* and the *inappropriate externalism condition*? The aim of the next chapter is to critically engage with some of the main argumentative strategies that political realists use to establish this distinctively political normativity.

Chapter 2 – Rejecting the (Distinctive) Normativity Internal to Politics

A distinctively political normativity plays a fundamental role in the political realist position and the political realist critique. Political realists argue that they are not advocating immorality or amorality in politics. Nor are they engaging in a purely descriptive endeavour. Instead, they are advocating “a greater autonomy to distinctively political thought” (*IBWD*, 3). This distinctively political normativity also allows them to distinguish themselves clearly from non-ideal theorists in the methodological disputes. This chapter aims to critically engage with some of the main arguments made by political realists to establish a distinctively political normativity. My aim is not to show that there is nothing distinctive about politics. I think everyone recognises that politics is a complex sphere of human activity. The fact that political theorists tend to use the term ‘political morality’ suggests that most political theorists accept this. The goal is to question the claim that political normativity is not (a) a subset of moral normativity, or (b) that it cannot/should not be evaluated by moral normativity.¹⁶ In other words, I will question whether political realists meet the *inappropriate externalism condition* I established in the previous chapter. I will argue that the main argumentative strategies used by political realists to meet the *inappropriate externalism condition* are unnecessarily complicated and implausible. I will do this in several ways. Firstly, I will show that their ‘thickening’ of the concept of politics is unnecessarily complex. Secondly, I will show that there is a limit to what the thick concept of politics can do to justify why we should establish political relations. Third, I will show how the constitutive features cannot be used to establish a distinctively political normativity because non-political realists are not trying to replace real-world political processes with their theories of justice. Finally, I will show that even if it is plausible to treat political disagreement differently than moral disagreement, we can give moral reasons for why we should treat these forms of disagreement differently.

¹⁶ Throughout this chapter, I will use the term ‘political moralist’ to mean someone who either (a) believes that political normativity is a subset of moral normativity, or (b) that we can apply moral standards to political situations and processes.

2. 1 – Thickening Concepts, Complexity without Payoff

Political realists argue that politics is a thick concept, which means it has an evaluative element to it, namely the distinction between sheer domination and politics. This evaluative element is a sufficient normative basis for political legitimacy. However, as Erman and Möller have stated, “a conceptual distinction does not entail incompatibility. That sheer domination and politics are distinct concepts is without question. But this does not mean that a state of domination cannot be political. A table and redness are clearly distinct, but a table may be red, all the same. Similarly, for thick concepts, an action may be both kind (positive valence) and unjust (negative valence) at the same time, although kindness and justice are distinct concepts” (Erman and Möller, 2018, 528).

Political realists want to avoid ‘starting with morality’ when they engage in political theory. The main charge that political realists make against moralists is that they “make the moral prior to the political” (*IBWD*, 3). Moralists start with morality rather than starting with the domain of politics, which is a unique and complex sphere of human activity. However, political realists make normative claims about politics themselves; they are not just providing descriptions about how the world works. The strategy that political realists employ to avoid ‘starting with morality’ themselves, namely to ‘thicken the concept of politics’ can be more confusing than helpful. To see this, we should return to the *Tyrant* case.

Tyrant – Imagine a ruthless dictator managed to obtain a monopoly of violence within a specific political community. Any form of dissent from the will of this dictator is repressed quickly and mercilessly. All forms of information and education that exists in this community are geared towards ‘brainwashing’ individuals in the community to believe that the dictator does in fact have the right to rule over their community (because it is ‘natural’ for them to do so, or that it is God’s will that they do so).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, political realists want to argue that the ruthless dictator has answered the First Political Question, but the *Tyrant* case is not a political situation. However, wouldn’t it be simpler to say that the *Tyrant* case is a political situation, but ultimately fails to meet some minimal normative standards, without

having to believe that these minimal normative standards are somehow derived from the concept of politics? Political realists argue that it is axiomatic to the concept of politics that it is a genuine answer to the First Political Question. However, there does not seem to be a compelling reason why believing *Tyrant* is a political situation is a category error rather than a normative one. Jubb and Rossi suggest that if we do not build the satisfaction of the Basic Legitimation Demand into our definition of politics, a moralist view “would have to think of itself as the justification of brute force through that force’s realisation of certain moral ends” (Jubb and Rossi, 2015, 457). However, I agree with Maynard and Worsnip that “this does not follow. We can resist building the satisfaction of the BLD into our *definition* of politics while still acknowledging its force as a principle that ought to *regulate* politics. In this way, we can avoid any need to justify brute force that fails to satisfy the BLD.” (Maynard and Worsnip, 2018, 782). They rightfully argue that “to say that politics *includes* sheer domination does not mean that *all politics* is sheer domination” (Maynard and Worsnip, 2018, 782).

I believe we can see how unnecessarily complicated the restrictive thickness of the concept of politics is by ‘thickening’ another concept. I will use the example of education and try to see if we can construct an ‘Educational Realist’ position. Educational realists are frustrated by most other theorists of education because these other theorists start with morality rather than starting from within the domain of education, which is a unique and complex sphere of human activity. We can say that education is a thick concept in the sense that some imparting of information and skills are required for there to be an educational situation. I will define the First Educational Question as ‘How do we cultivate knowledge, skills, dispositions and attitudes in people, particularly younger generations?’ Providing an answer to this question is a necessary condition for a situation to be considered educational. In other words, if someone were to call themselves an educator or if someone wanted to set up a set of institutions that provided education, they would have to provide an answer to the First Educational Question.

However, imparting knowledge or cultivating skills is not valuable if the knowledge provided and the skills developed are not good for the individual being educated. A tyrannical government can impart fake information about the activities of the regime and cultivate dispositions of servility and obedience to the regime. Only a few of the

goods provided by the ‘education’ system of this tyrannical regime is geared towards the individual flourishing of the educated; citizens need at least a basic level of knowledge and skills to flourish. For all these reasons, we can call it an axiom of education that indoctrination is not education. Just like when political realists argue that there is a conceptual distinction between political authority and sheer domination, we can say that there is a conceptual distinction between education and indoctrination.¹⁷ An education provider needs to say something about why the information conveyed is not false or the dispositions developed are valuable for the individuals themselves. We can call this ‘something needs to be said’ as the Basic Educational Demand.

The Basic Educational Demand represents a normativity that is internal to the concept of education. It is distinct from moral normativity, and it would be inappropriate to apply moral normativity to educational normativity. Someone might ask the educational realist whether the Basic Educational Demand is itself a moral principle. It requires us to provide a reason for why the provision of education is beneficial to the flourishing of individuals being educated, and it requires the provider to ensure that their claims are truthful. The Basic Educational Demand sets a normative standard for a practice to be considered valuable. The educational realist can argue that if the Demand is a moral principle, it does not represent a ‘morality which is prior’ to education. The Basic Educational Demand follows from there being such a thing as education.

If political and educational realists are also asking moral questions about politics/education (in some sense), we should ask whether the thickening of the concept is an activity that is worth engaging in. If there is a simpler way to conceptualise education and politics that can achieve the same goals of the educational realist and the political realist, this might give us a good reason to argue against the educational and political realist approach to their subject matter. As Valentini argues, “all other things being equal, a very parsimonious theory (i.e., one with simpler propositions/a less complex system of axioms) is better, namely more useful and tractable, than a less

¹⁷ Of course, Erman and Möller’s argument that ‘a conceptual distinction does not entail incompatibility’ can also be applied to the educational realist attempt to set up a conceptual distinction between education and indoctrination (Erman and Möller, 2018).

parsimonious one” (Valentini, 2017, 15).¹⁸ We can say that education is “descriptively concerned simply with the processes that produce the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and attitudes that inhere in people ... on [this] alternative conceptualisation, children might be ‘educated’ in ways that not only fail but do not even try to develop their potentialities, and it is a separate question what particular goods education should indeed seek to promote, both in the lives of those being educated and in those of third parties who stand to benefit or suffer from the way others are educated.” (Swift, 2017, 765). We can refer to this as the ‘thinner’ account of education.

We can use examples to show the advantages of this method over the educational realist position. We can return to the *Tyrant* case. The tyrannical regime’s school system fills its subjects’ heads with false information and self-serving ideology. The educational realist wants to argue that the regime’s school system is not educating their students. The reason for this is due to the concept of education itself, which is separate from the concept of indoctrination. It is a thick concept that has the resources within the concept itself to determine when an educational provider is, in fact, providing an education. The ‘thinner’ account of education accepts that there are goods that only education and practices of education can provide. However, that does not mean we cannot ask moral questions or apply moral standards to those practices that provide those goods. We can say that the regimes school system in the *Tyrant* case is failing to provide the particular goods that education should seek to promote. This achieves a similar result to the one that educational realists want, but in a way that is more straightforward. It seems strange to insist that the regime’s school system is making a category error rather than a normative one. If we can achieve the same goal that educational realist wants by relying on a thinner conception of education in a more parsimonious fashion, why can’t we do the same thing with politics?

Political realists might argue that there needs to be a more distinctively political normativity because it tends to make normative recommendations that go against what morality demands. We can use the *Two Princes* case that I started with as an example of this idea. D’Agostino should do something that moral normativity tells him he should

¹⁸ To be clear, Valentini was saying that this was a desideratum of a good theory of justice. However, I think there are good reasons to believe that parsimony is a good feature of a theory of politics and education as well as justice.

not do, namely be violent. However, this breaks the *charitability condition*. It is only by relying on a poor account of moral normativity, one that makes simple deontological constraints that fail to take into consideration context and proportionality that this argument truly works. We can apply the same poor account of moral normativity to show why it is important to talk about an educational normativity. Sometimes educational normativity will make demands that go against moral normativity because what morality demands is to tell the truth in its entirety. According to this poor account of moral normativity, we must tell the truth to children in primary schools, without simplifying the knowledge for their circumstances. Educational normativity would understand the particular constraints that primary teachers face and therefore make a recommendation that certain idealisations (IE – falsifications of the truth for educational purposes) are acceptable when teaching primary school children (under certain conditions). Like the argument for a uniquely political normativity, this argument for a uniquely educational normativity succeeds only by violating the *charitability condition*.

Finally, political realists might respond by arguing that their ‘thickening’ of the concept of politics is justifiable because it is (a) how people ordinarily use the term politics, or (b) how people should use the term politics. I will start with the first response. Do most people use the term politics the way political realists do? I do not believe this is true. We can see this by comparing it with education. I believe educational realists can say more persuasively that they use the term education in the way that people ordinarily use the term. The term education has a positive valence. Few politicians would argue that they are ‘against education’. At best, they would argue against the system that is delivering education. There is no book entitled ‘In Defence of Education’.¹⁹ On the other hand, there is a book entitled ‘In Defence of Politics’. In this book, Crick claims that many people “think that politics is muddled, contradictory, self-defeatingly recurrent, unprogressive, unpatriotic, inefficient, mere compromise, or even a sham or conspiracy by which political parties seek to preserve some particular and peculiar social systems against the challenge of the inevitable future, etc.” and that the main aim of his book is “to help in the task of restoring confidence in the virtues of politics as a great

¹⁹ A book recently published by Bryan Caplan is entitled ‘The Case Against Education’. However, the subtitle of the book clearly establishes the focus of the book as against the currently existing ‘education system’. Furthermore, both the argument and the title of the book are clearly controversial, which shows how highly we ordinarily regard the concept of education.

and civilizing human activity” (Crick, 2005, 1-2). The fact that Crick believed this defence was necessary shows that people do not ordinarily see politics in the restrictive way that political realists do.

Should we use the concept of politics in this thick way? As mentioned before, political realists might argue that thickening the concept is important because that is how we should use the term, and the fact that so many people use the term in a negative way shows how important this thickening process is. I am sceptical that we should use the term in the restrictive way that political realists do. We can easily accept that politics is “radically different from tyranny, oligarchy, kingship, dictatorship, despotism, and – what is probably the only distinctively modern type of rule – totalitarianism” (Crick, 2005, 4). However, the way that political realists use the term politics also excludes anarchism as a political viewpoint and implies that the term ‘political violence’ is a misnomer (Maynard and Worsnip, 2018, 782). Regarding political violence, political realists have to deny Lenin’s and Clausewitz’s famous dictum that “war is the continuation of politics by other (i. e. violent) means” (Lenin, 2011, 304). They must argue that politics is a replacement of war. Secondly, in terms of anarchism, political realists give little reason to exclude anarchism as a political viewpoint. Williams only discusses anarchism once in his book on political philosophy. He states that we do not have to take anarchist claims about a loss of liberty “seriously” because “liberty is freedom as a political value, no complaint is a liberty is freedom as a political value, no complaint is a complaint in liberty if it would apply to any political system or any state whatsoever, so the existence of the state is not itself an offense against or limitation on liberty” (*IBWD*, 85).²⁰ Even if this claim is plausible, it is limited to the anarchist complaint that their liberty is being taken from them. It is insufficient to show that the ‘positive view’ of anarchism, developed by the likes of Godwin or Kropotkin are not political positions.²¹

²⁰ Judith Shklar dismisses anarchism as a political position even quicker than Williams’s dismissal by asking the question “Does anyone want to live in Beirut?”, which presumably was a reference to the horrible conditions of the Lebanese Civil War (Shklar, 1989, 37).

²¹ This is not to suggest that anarchism needs to be a political position or that political violence is not a misnomer. However, political realists have not given us sufficient reason to believe otherwise.

The desire to thicken concepts such as education and politics like this is understandable. I believe it usually emerges as a reaction to how others are theorising about the concept. Educational realists might insist that we should think about the concept of education in this way because other theorists of education tend to see it as merely an instrument for other goals. As Danielle Allen argues “discussions of educational reform are very often proxies for conversations about poverty and, insofar as this is the case, it is often unclear how much the conversation actually concerns education itself ... In other words, for all of our talk about education and equality, we do not actually talk very much about education itself, in itself, relates to equality” (Allen, 2016, 5). The way the discussion about education can be frustrating for someone who believes that “education itself – a practice of human development - has, intrinsic to the practice, important contributions to make to the defence of human equality, the cultivation of political and social equality, and the emergence of fair economic orders” (Allen, 2016, 5). Educational realists can argue that theorists of education have “lost sight of just how education in itself, and putting aside questions of funding and distribution, relates to ... egalitarian concerns” and the aim of thickening the concept of education is to “effect a recovery of our understanding” of education (Allen, 2016, 5-6). I believe political realists share a similar frustration when they see the state of politics in political theory today. Williams very clearly states his frustration with the state of political science and political theory today, and how they represent a “Manichaeian dualism of soul and body, high-mindedness and the pork barrel” (*IBWD*, 12). Just like the educational realist, political realists might be frustrated that people are treating politics as “an instrument of the moral”, which is the exact description Williams provides for the *enactment* model that he believes is paradigmatic of political moralism and how they view politics (*IBWD*, 2). Even at its most ‘political’, political theorists try to avoid being ‘political in the wrong way’, which political realists believe is a more accurate depiction of politics. There is a sense in which ‘high-minded’ moralistic political theory is not acknowledging the complexity of the phenomenon or the practices they are supposedly commenting on. ‘Thickening’ the concept can be a way of showing the ‘proper level of respect’ to the phenomenon under review. I am sympathetic with political realists in the sense that political moralists tend not to engage in theorising about “a form of practical reason better suited to political agents acting in the political realm” (Sleat, 2018, 7). However, if political realists want more theorists to theorise about politics in the way that they do, they will need to

convert more political theorists to their cause. This conversion process can only be harmed if the discussion is more convoluted than it needs to be. A simpler approach to normative theorising about politics can make it easier for new converts to engage in political theory in the way that political realists want.

Let me summarise the argument against the ‘concept of politics’ playing the role that political realists want it to play. Firstly, just because there is a distinction between two concepts does not mean that they are incompatible. Secondly, complicating and ‘thickening’ the concept of politics in the way that political realists do is not intrinsically problematic, but there should ideally be a justification for why we should take such a route when there are simpler ones available.²² I used the example of the concept of education to show how there seems to be very little pay off for ‘thickening’ the concept of education to generate a normativity internal to education which can be used to evaluate educational practices without relying on a normativity that is ‘external’ to education. Finally, I argued that the thickening of the concept of politics cannot be justified by referencing ordinary usage of the term and that insufficient reasons have been provided for why we should use the term politics in the way that political realists do. What political realists want political theory to be can be made much clearer if they simply argued that they want to theorise about what political agents should do under the circumstances of politics, which is an account of political realism I will develop further in the next chapter.

2. 2 – ‘The ‘Priority’ of Politics to Morality

As mentioned in Chapter 1, answering the First Political Question is insufficient for a situation to be referred to as a political. However, an answer to the First Political Question is a necessary condition for a situation to be political. We need an answer to it before we can begin to answer any other political questions. Normative questions about politics asked after the First Political Question, then, do not represent a morality

²² I do not want to argue that the simple method is always the better method. However, if we can achieve the same goals that political realists want (practical reasons and normativity that is more suited to the unique challenges that political agents face in the real world) through simpler means, there needs to be good justifications for why the method is more complex than it needs to be. Much like the Basic Legitimation Demand, I believe something needs to be said to justify the extra steps of complexity.

that is 'prior to politics'. Instead, Williams argues that if the Basic Legitimation Demand is a moral principle, "it does not represent a morality which is prior to politics. It is a claim that is inherent in there being such a thing as politics: in particular, because it is inherent in there being first a political question" (*IBWD*, 5). The question is whether this is a plausible argument to avoid the *tu quoque* charge that political realists are also starting to theorise about politics with moral principles.

We can start by questioning the idea of a morality that is not 'prior to politics'. Erman and Möller argue that starting with ethics/morality is necessary when theorising about legitimacy. According to them, the way political realists discuss legitimacy relies on normative conditions that inevitably transcend actual political processes. It is worth quoting their argument in full.

In order for a political order to be legitimate, the agreement (Horton) or willing consent (Bellamy) must be perceived as free (Newey), and thus cannot rely on means that are too tyrannical (Horton), be coerced (Williams) or be a result of total deception (Horton). The question is, in light of the realist emphasis on the actual circumstances of politics, how are these normative restrictions established? Basically, either the two conditions of legitimacy are established by actual political processes, or they are not. If they are indeed established by actual processes, such that a political order is legitimate insofar as it is in accordance with the process in question, we have started on a regress of justification. Because what if this process is due to a too tyrannical order? If all we do is adhere to a new actual (meta) process or arrangement, we are merely pushing the justificatory question one more step, not responding to it. Consequently, realists are well aware that the only way out of this regress is to acknowledge that not all sources of legitimacy are due to the actual political context in which they are formulated. Legitimacy in this sense transcends actual politics, as it were (Erman and Möller, 2015, 221).

Of course, political realists would respond to this argument by stating that legitimacy transcends actual political processes, but not the concept of politics itself. It is the evaluative element of the thick concept of politics that provides the perspective that transcends real-world political processes and does not represent a morality 'prior to politics'. However, there is something strange about the language of priority. Just

because the First Political Question is answered first before moving on to satisfying the Basic Legitimation Demand does not necessarily mean that politics is meaningfully prior to a moral principle. The First Political Question also needs to be answered before we can engage in any form of meaningful scientific inquiry. As Estlund argues “As in the political case, that is a kind of primacy (if we can call it that) of a certain state of affairs over certain other states of affairs ... But questions about those social preconditions are not thereby shown to be fundamental scientific questions enjoying some kind of primacy or centrality in the domain of scientific inquiry, which they patently are not” (Estlund, 2017, 371-372). As Maynard and Worsnip argue “a moral principle that must be satisfied (at least minimally) for a situation to count as political is still, it would seem, a moral principle, and we see no obvious reason to hold that it is moral in some less deep or genuine sense” (Maynard and Worsnip, 2018, 783). They use the example of the practice of employment. They argue “one can define the practice of employment (as contrasted with forced labour) partly in terms of the satisfaction of the principle that people should not be compelled into employer/employee relations against their will” (Maynard and Worsnip, 2018, 783). However, just because employment is defined in this way does not mean that the principle is “less deeply moral in character” (Maynard and Worsnip, 2018, 783).

Even if this language of priority did make sense, this would be insufficient to establish a distinctively political normativity. There is a difference between satisfying a principle and justifying why a principle should be satisfied. Political realists seem to be conflating these activities in the process of advocating a distinctively political normativity. It is in the definition of politics (according to political realists) that the Basic Legitimation Demand must be satisfied. However, Maynard and Worsnip argue “a putative principle is satisfied when its normative demands are met, that is, when it is adhered to. By contrast, it is justified when it is shown to have normative force, that is, when it is shown why it ought to be adhered to” (Maynard and Worsnip, 2018, 784). We can satisfy the Basic Legitimation Demand without necessarily justifying why the Demand should be met. Satisfying the Basic Legitimation Demand might represent a morality that is not prior to politics. But we can ask another moral question before satisfying the principle, namely why should we satisfy it in the first place? We can now ask the presumably moral question “why should we, in a given situation or toward a given group of fellow human beings, engage in relationships of authority justified by a legitimating story that meets

the critical theory principle?” (Maynard and Worsnip, 2018, 784). What the political realists are doing in conflating these two activities to avoid the charge that they are engaging in moral theorising that is ‘prior’ to politics is concealing “the need for normative justification” (Maynard and Worsnip, 2018, 784).

Maynard and Worsnip admit that just because the Basic Legitimation Demand needs to be justified “does not in itself show that such justification must be moral in character” (Maynard and Worsnip, 2018, 785). However, I do not believe they go far enough in their criticism. We can go further by asking the question ‘why should we answer the First Political Question?’ We know the answer to that question cannot be political. There cannot be a political question before the ‘First’ Political Question. Any justification for why we should answer the First Political Question will most likely include some combination of moral and prudential reasons. For example, we might say that it is in everyone’s interests, regardless of their conception of the good, to have some semblance of order. We might also say that it would be more efficient to have centralised mechanisms of dispute resolution. Whatever the correct answer to this question is, we should be able to ask whether the justification for why the Basic Legitimation Demand should be satisfied coheres with the justification for why we should answer the First Political Question. Williams himself states “there are no doubt reasons for stopping warfare” and that “crimes against stateless persons are surely crimes, and Helot-like slavery surely violates rights” (*IBWD*, 6). Whatever the proper relationship between the two questions (why we should answer the First Political Question versus why we should satisfy the Basic Legitimation Demand), it seems like we should be able to evaluate the normativity internal to politics from a pre-political perspective.

2. 3 – The Constitutive Features of Politics

Political realists have consistently argued that political moralists are not engaging with ‘real politics’. As mentioned before, Rossi and Sleat argue “If ethics could effectively regulate behaviour in political communities ... we would not require politics. We need politics in part precisely because of the ubiquity of moral disagreements about what we collectively should do” (Rossi and Sleat, 2014, 691). Some might argue that if principles that regulate the political realm are ‘distinctively political’ rather than moral, political realists face an ‘obvious’ problem. Maynard and Worsnip ask “what reason is there to

think that such distinctively political principles will not also be deeply contested? And if such distinctively political principles are themselves deeply contested, why are they any better suited than moral principles to resolving disagreements?” (Maynard and Worsnip, 2018, 768). Political realists might respond to this question by stating that “the relevant political principles are in some way normatively thinner, and consequently less contentious than moral principles” (Maynard and Worsnip, 2018, 768). However, Maynard and Worsnip argue that this is exactly what moralists do when they advocate a form of proceduralism. Proceduralists argue that “it may be possible to reach a greater degree of consensus on ... procedural principles than on principles that apply in the first instance to outcomes”, however, they would still recognise that their principles are “moral principles” (Maynard and Worsnip, 2018, 769).

I am generally sympathetic to Maynard and Worsnip’s analysis about moral proceduralism versus political principles, but I believe they do not do enough to provide the most charitable account of what political realists would say in response to the obvious point that political principles will also be deeply contested. Political realists argue that politics is always contextual, relative to a specific location and time. Within a given context, there may be many different reasons why a sovereign has established order. Some of them might be very normatively thin or procedural. It might be that a partial account of the legitimisation story is that it is in everyone’s interests to live in a state than to live in anarchic conditions. However, some of them might also be very thick. Throughout Western Europe, there are many countries that are constitutional monarchies. While a full account of why this is the case is outside the scope of this thesis, it is safe to say that it is partially an outcome of a compromise (or series of compromises) that occurred between different interests (Stepan, Linz, and Minoves, 2014). Another example can be seen in post-war Japan. Even though there were demands to bring the Japanese monarchy to trial for war crimes, “Douglas MacArthur, the American commander of the Allied occupation of Japan, decided that it was essential to keep the Emperor on his throne as a possible unifying force in a country that faced political chaos as the postwar period began” (Trumbull, 1989). The point is that political realists believe we all live in particular social worlds, with cultures and norms that are generally accepted and help establish order. Moralists tend to abstract away from these local contexts and therefore fail to understand the many complex mechanisms that need to be used to establish and maintain order within a political

community. However, getting an accurate description of these mechanisms that resolve disagreement is very important for political realists when they are engaging in normative theorising about politics.²³ Stears puts this understanding of politics best when he argues that “politics is a process through which agreement is forged ... rather than a process which is dependent upon agreement before it begins ... agreement, in so far as it exists at all, is an artefact of the practice called politics” (Stears, 2007, 542).

Of course, this response by the political realist opens another more fundamental problem, namely that they seem to have misunderstood what the role that political moralists want to play when they engage in normative theorising. When political moralists engage in normative theorising, they are not trying to argue about what would literally resolve a real-world disagreement. No moralist would be naïve enough to believe that all disagreements in the real world will be resolved through reasonable philosophical discourse without the use of power. Even in their ideal states, most moralists take for granted the need for some form of centralised coercion and authority, which means they clearly recognise the need for using power to coerce people to comply when some people disagree. When political moralists engage in normative theorising that they believe will ‘resolve disagreement’, they mean it in a normative sense. Imagine two parties are fighting over a resource. Moralists are interested in the question ‘who has the right/who is morally entitled to this resource?’ A moralist will look at the claims made by both parties and try to provide an answer to who is morally entitled to the resource and try to provide the best moral justifications for why they believe that party is entitled to that resource. They do not believe that their moral arguments and principles can literally replace real-world political processes. Maynard and Worsnip (2018, 769) make a distinction between resolving disagreement in a normative sense and in a *de facto* sense. Politics is necessary for establishing order and resolving disagreement in a *de facto* sense. Moralists are aware of the messy nature of the real world and the fact that no matter how good their moral reasons are, there will be unreasonable people who are insincere in their moral reasoning or simply unwilling to engage in the deliberative process. They will use their political power to direct the resources to themselves even if (from a moral perspective) they are not entitled to those resources. However, what

²³ I will discuss the importance of ‘diagnosing the political problem’ more in the next chapter, where I try to establish the ‘best’ version of political realism, one that avoids discussion of a distinctive normativity internal to politics.

moralists are generally interested in is offering principles “as normative tools for *evaluating* such political processes and their outcomes in terms of their justice, rightness, and so on” (Maynard and Worsnip, 2018, 769). To say that the way that political moralists engage in normative theorising is problematic because they fail to resolve disagreement in the *de facto* sense misses the point of what moralists are doing when they engage in normative theorising.

Given this distinction between resolving disagreement in a normative and *de facto* sense, knowing exactly whom political realists are arguing against can be tricky. Political realists claim that they are not against normative theorising about politics. They are arguing against “conceiving of the ‘basic relation of morality to politics as being represented by either the enactment or the structural model’” (Hall, 2015, 476). Which means that there is nothing wrong with making moral/normative judgments about politics. As long as we avoid conceiving the basic relation set out by the enactment or structural model, we avoid the “‘applied moral philosophy’ approach to political theory that [Williams] seeks to refute” (Hall, 2015, 476). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the enactment model states that “political theory formulates principles, concepts, ideals, and values; and politics (so far as it does what the theory wants) seeks to express these in political action, through persuasion, the use of power, and so forth” (*IBWD*, 1). The structural model states that “theory lays down moral conditions of co-existence under power, conditions in which power can be justly exercised” (*IBWD*, 1). Let us assume that these models are representative of how political theorists engage in political theory. If an enactment model theorist believed that real world disagreements would *de facto* be resolved through the ‘principles, concepts, ideals and values’ laid out by the theorist, they would simply be wrong. The same can be said for the structural model. A structural model theorist would be unrealistic if they believed that real-world disagreement would literally be resolved in a way that respects the moral conditions set out by their theory of justice. However, this does not necessarily mean that these theorists would be wrong about how real-world political processes should look like. If we imagine utilitarianism is true,

we should be able to say that political processes should (ideally) be used to maximise utility.²⁴

To summarise this criticism against a distinctively political normativity, political realists are right to emphasise the complex nature of establishing order in real politics. Many rules and institutions play a role in establishing order that even political scientists do not fully understand. However, their arguments are problematic in two ways. Firstly, it would be uncharitable to argue that political moralists do not understand the complex nature of politics. Secondly, they are wrong to believe that political moralists are trying to replace those mechanisms with ethics or morality. Moralists tend to be interested in the question of how we resolve disagreements in a normative way and with providing the tools to evaluate existing political processes that establish order. I am sympathetic to the political realist belief that there should be more normative work within the context of real-world disagreement. Having the ‘right answer’ when resolving a disagreement in the normative sense will be of little help for political agents to resolve conflict in real-world contexts. However, this does not mean that there is no right moral answer, or that there is something wrong with wanting to know what the right answer is, even if it is completely useless in helping political agents resolve the disagreement in a *de facto* sense. When there is a disagreement between two parties, most of the time, the resolution of that disagreement will reflect the disparity of power between those parties, which will most likely not be a just resolution of the disagreement. However, because political realists and moralists can agree with the claim that might does not make right, political moralists are interested in the question ‘what are these parties in this dispute entitled to?’ and it is worth answering this question even if it will not have a direct impact on the real-world resolution of this dispute. Political moralists should be allowed to morally evaluate not only the outcomes of political processes, but the political processes themselves.

²⁴ A political realist might argue that arguments that resolve disagreement in a normative sense are ‘useless’ due to the complexity of managing real world disagreement. I will discuss the idea of usefulness and political theory in chapter 5, where I discuss the moralist response.

2. 4 - The Uniqueness of Political Disagreement versus Moral Disagreement

Political realists will sometimes refer to political disagreement as something special or different from moral disagreement. Because of this, we should treat political disagreement differently from moral disagreement. We can consider this different treatment to be where we find a distinctively political normativity. There are at least two strategies to identify this uniqueness of political disagreement.

The first strategy is a form of historicist scepticism about our political convictions. We know that “our and others’ convictions have to a great degree been the product of previous historical conditions, and of an obscure mixture of beliefs ... passions, interests, and so forth” (*IBWD*, 12-13). We can reflect on our own history and recognise “to some extent how these convictions came about, and why they worked if they did and didn’t work when they didn’t; and we would be merely naive if we took our convictions, and those of our opponents, as simply autonomous products of moral reason rather than as another product of historical conditions” (*IBWD*, 13). The idea seems to be something like that our political convictions are the product of a particular history rather than the product of reason. The same can be said about the moral and political convictions of people who disagree with us. Those who disagree with us in politics should be treated as political opponents rather than mistaken “moral interlocutors whose objections we can discount because they are intellectually mistaken” (Hall, 2017, 293). When we make a political decision, we should treat those who disagree with that decision not as morally or intellectually mistaken “fellow seekers after truth”, but as political opponents who “*have lost*” (*IBWD*, 13). I dedicate the last chapter of this thesis to this argument of historicist scepticism, so I will not discuss it further here.

The other strategy is to focus on what the disagreement is ultimately about, namely the establishment of order by using political power. Political realists might argue that when political moralists are engaged in moral disagreement, what they are doing is trying to find the best or true moral principle (to regulate or evaluate an institution or individual behaviour). However, simply because a moral principle is the correct moral principle, does not mean that we should enforce it politically. As Sangiovanni argues “the fact that it is *political* rather than merely *moral* disagreement is important ... institutions present

solutions to disagreements that might involve moral – and indeed ideological, interpretive, and evaluative – questions. The crucial point is that they are not *merely* about moral, ideological, interpretive, or evaluative questions. They are not merely disagreements about sentiments or beliefs – X is right, good, true, best, genuine – but, more fundamentally, about how those sentiments or beliefs justify *the exercise and command of political power* ... which party is *politically* justified in laying claim to the armature of political authority and military power that shapes basic constraints and opportunities” (Sangiovanni, 2008, 157).

The establishment of order using political power and coercion can have a very significant impact on the lives of citizens, which is why we need extra justification when an agent gains the use of political power. It might be argued that when the principle is not (sufficiently) accepted by those subject to this power, or where there is deep disagreement about the principle, the moral principle might be the correct moral principle, but it would be illegitimate to enforce in politics. According to Larmore, political philosophy cannot be anything like ‘applied moral philosophy’, and we need to have more distinctively political thinking because of this fact. As Larmore argues “you have your moral views, I have mine, and each of us is convinced that he is right, standing ready to show the other the errors of his ways. But once we confront the problem of how people like us are to live together, we enter the terrain of political philosophy” (Larmore, 2018, 29). Because there is a gap between the correct moral principle and the legitimacy of enforcing that principle, political realists might argue that they are thinking about legitimacy in a way that is not (purely) moral in character.

There is a problem with this attempt to develop a normativity internal to politics. Firstly, I believe a lot of political moralists accept that political philosophy should not be something like applied moral philosophy. They agree that even though we know we have the correct moral principle, this does not mean that we can enforce it through political power. Rawls himself explicitly states that his theory “is not intended as the application of a general moral conception to the basic structure of society, as if this structure were simply another case to which that general moral conception is applied” (CP, 225). Due to the features of the political, he argues that his theory is “not applied moral philosophy ... rather, it is a formulation of a family of highly significant (moral) values that properly apply to basic political institutions; it gives a specification of those

values which takes account of certain special features of the political relationship, as distinct from other relationships” (*CP*, 482). As Nussbaum argues “respect for one’s fellow citizens as equals requires not building the state on the ascendancy of any one particular comprehensive doctrine of the purpose and meaning of life, however excellent” (Nussbaum, 2011, 21-22). Most political moralists recognise that there is a distinction between what the best moral theory is and what principles should be enforced through political power. However, they would not argue they were advocating a distinctively political normativity. The reason for this is that they would recognise that “impermissibility of forcing citizens to abide by private moral doctrines can itself be moral in nature” (Maynard and Worsnip, 2018, 767). Rawls argues that one of the main reasons why we should care about liberal legitimacy is respect for citizens as equals, which seems like a moral argument (to restrain political power from being used according to other moral arguments) rather than a distinctively political one.

Even if political moralists were only interested in ‘private moral doctrines’, this does not mean that moralists could not consider the difference between moral and political disagreement, and the centrality of political power and coercion in this difference. Moralists recognise that there is an important distinction between duties and enforceable duties. A moralist could argue from a ‘private morality’ perspective that individuals have a duty to do certain things, for example, a duty to donate a certain amount of disposable income to charity. However, this does not mean that we as fellow citizens or the state should be able to enforce those duties using political power. In other words, this duty is not enforceable, which means that we cannot use the powers of the state to force people to abide by their duty if they are failing to donate the amount they should be donating. I am not saying that everyone will agree with this analysis. For example, presumably some consequentialists will argue that if forcing someone to donate more money to charity will generate a significantly better outcome, we should use the powers of the state to enforce the duty of charity. My point, however, is that these distinctions are available even for moralists who are engaging in some form of applied moral philosophy. They can discuss the illegitimacy of enforcing certain moral claims without having to develop a normativity internal to politics.

2. 5 - Conclusion

As I showed in the previous chapter, the idea of a normativity internal to politics plays a major role in the political realist position and the political realist critique against moralistic political theory. This chapter showed that some of the main argumentative strategies that political realists use to establish this distinctively political normativity are ultimately unsuccessful.

I started off by arguing that political realists have unnecessarily ‘thickened’ the concept of politics I used the example of education to show how strange this process of thickening was. I then talked about how the constitutive features of politics cannot be used to show that there is a distinctively political normativity because it fundamentally misunderstands the goal of most contemporary normative political theorists, who are trying to resolve disagreement in a normative sense, not in a *de facto* sense. Finally, political realists argue that political disagreement is not the same as moral disagreement, because it is about the use of political power. I rejected this argument because even though moralists might agree that political philosophy should not be something like applied moral philosophy, the reason why we should not use political power in a way that non-political moral principles demand is itself moral.

This does raise an interesting question. If it is true that there is no meaningfully distinctive political normativity, what does this mean for political realism as a position, and the political realist critique? Are they not as distinctive anymore? I believe they are. The aim of the next chapter is to show how we can develop an account of political realism that does not rely on a distinctively political normativity.

Chapter 3 – A New Political Realism: Theorising about Politics with an Ethic of Responsibility

The previous chapter rejected some of the main ways political realists have tried to establish a distinctively political normativity. More work needs to be done if political realists want to insist that political normativity is (a) not a subset of moral normativity or (b) cannot/should not be evaluated by morality. This seems to raise a significant challenge to political realism. As mentioned in chapter 1, one of the main contributions of political realism, one that made political realism distinct from other methodological positions, is the development of a distinctively political normativity. If the current literature has not provided us with sufficient reason to believe that this normativity exists, what should we think about political realism and its critique of normative political theory? I believe the rejection of a distinctive political normativity does not mean that we can ignore political realism as a school of thought. Contemporary political realists tend to say they are ‘rediscovering’ a neglected tradition. They claim that political realism has a distinguished pedigree and cite a long list of historical figures who are traditionally associated with political realism, such as Thrasymachus, Hobbes, and Machiavelli. Of course, merely because a methodology has a long tradition does not make it plausible. However, I do believe that the existence of this pedigree should make us more cautious. More needs to be said about what political realism is before we say that it is not offering anything unique.

I believe political realists have put too much emphasis on the idea of a distinctively political normativity. There are other resources within the canonical texts of political realism that can be used to develop a unique position in the methodological debates. I believe one of the best places to develop a political realism that does not rely on there being a distinctively political normativity can be found in what Williams found frustrating about the field of political science and political theory. He claimed that his view is “in part a reaction to the intense moralism of much American political and indeed legal theory, which is predictably matched by the concentration of American political science on the coordination of private or group interests” (*IBWD*, 12). Political scientists were trying to be scientists; engaging in what they perceived to be a value-free empirical exercise to help explain political behaviour. They avoided discussions of value (except for explanatory purposes). Although they did well in discussing issues of power

and the limitations of individual power, political action was explained mostly in terms of political gain, interest, and survival. On the other hand, political theorists engaged in normative analysis. Rather than engaging in the “‘politics’ of Congress”, political theory was focused on “the principled arguments of the Supreme Court” (*IBWD*, 12). Williams believed that these two forms of thought were “made for each other. They represent a Manichaeian dualism of soul and body, high-mindedness and the pork barrel, and the existence of each helps to explain how anyone could have accepted the other” (*IBWD*, 12).

Williams goes on to explain his alternative way of theorising about politics, one that tries to encapsulate both strands of the discipline of politics. It is worth quoting him in detail here to provide some of the intuitive appeal of theorising about politics in the way that Williams advocated.

“I want a broader view of the content of politics, not confined to interest, together with a more realistic view of the powers, opportunities, and limitations of political actors, where all the considerations that bear on political action – both ideals and, for example, political survival – can come to one focus of decision ... The ethic that relates to this is what Weber called *Verantwortungsethik*, the ethic of responsibility” (*IBWD*, 12)

Compare this ethic of responsibility with two other ethics.²⁵ Weber contrasted the ethic of responsibility with the ethic of conviction. A political agent who acts with an ethic of conviction is mainly concerned with the purity of their intentions. As Weber argues “Such a man believes that if an action performed out of pure conviction has evil consequences, then the responsibility must lie not with the agent but with the world, the stupidity of men-or the will of God who created them thus” (Weber, 2004, 84). This is a useful contrasting tool to help us understand the ethic of responsibility. However, I do not believe many political theorists theorise about politics with an ethic of conviction. Few (if any) political theorists today would believe we should “let justice be done, and let the world perish” (Weber, 2004, xlv). A slightly more accurate label would be what I refer to as the ethic of principle. When theorising about politics with the ethic

²⁵ My discussion of different ethics in this paragraph is mainly meant as a comparative tool for clarity. It is not meant to provide an accurate interpretation of Weber’s work, nor is it meant to provide an all things considered description of all work done by political theorists.

of principle, political theorists are mainly concerned with principled arguments. Generally, in deliberation of the kind that occurs in moral and political philosophy seminars, certain arguments are excluded because they are unreasonable.²⁶ For example, most political philosophers would not believe that an agent's political survival or self-interest would be sufficient reason (in most cases) to outweigh our basic duties of justice. When engaging with disagreement, a theorist with an ethic of principle is concerned not with all forms of disagreement, but reasonable disagreement.²⁷ It would be inaccurate to suggest that theorists who theorise about politics with an ethic of principle are somehow 'irresponsible'.²⁸ A more accurate description is that there is a limit to how directly useful real political agents will find their principles in the process of engaging in political struggle in a responsible manner. A political agent who tried to apply a theory of justice without properly contextualising what that theory of justice demanded would most likely be acting irresponsibly.²⁹

Political realists want political theorists to theorise about politics with an ethic of responsibility. We should accept that ideas and principles play an important role in politics. However, when it comes to achieving the outcomes that we want in politics, we have to look at politics realistically, and this means taking 'all the considerations that bear on political action', the most important of which is power. This chapter aims to develop this ethic of responsibility. Broadly speaking, there are at least three major ways a political theorist can theorise about politics with an ethic of responsibility. The first is to produce an accurate model of the political situation. The second is to use this model to help political agents make 'responsible' decisions when engaging with political struggle and managing political disagreement. Finally, political theorists should analyse political institutions in a 'realistic' and historically-sensitive manner. The rest of the chapter will discuss what it means to engage in these tasks. One important feature they

²⁶ Throughout the rest of this thesis, I will refer to the 'political moralist' as someone who theorises about politics (or justice) with an ethic of principle.

²⁷ I discuss what it means to engage with reasonable disagreement in much more detail in Chapter 6.

²⁸ One of the main arguments of this thesis is that no sensible political moralist would reject the ethic of responsibility.

²⁹ I will use specific examples in this chapter and next chapter to show how political realists make this argument. The most relevant sections are in sections 3. 5 (where Geuss discusses Tony Blair's actions in Iraq) and 4. 1 (where I use the recent political backlash against Germany's inclusive refugee policy).

have in common is the need to be deeply contextual. It is for this reason that political realists will repeatedly use the phrase ‘now and around here’ (*IBWD*, 8; Hall, 2014; and Sagar, 2014). For reasons that will become clearer in this chapter, it is very important for the theorist of politics to engage with the difficult contexts that real political agents face in political struggle.

I believe this form of political realism has a better shot at pointing out what is missing in contemporary political theory without relying on something as controversial as a distinctively political normativity. For the sake of simplicity, I will generally refer to ‘theorising about politics with an ethic of responsibility’ as ‘theorising about politics responsibly’. This chapter will start by discussing the three main tasks of theorising about politics responsibly. It will then try to answer questions such as ‘what does it mean to model the political situation?’, ‘how do we guide political agents to act responsibly?’, and ‘what does it mean to design realistic institutions?’. I will then discuss if there are any political ends that all responsible political agents should pursue. The final section will analyse two examples of theorising about politics responsibly provided by political realists. The first is Raymond Geuss’s analysis of Tony Blair’s actions in the run-up to the Iraq War, and the second is Karuna Mantena’s analysis of Gandhi’s realism when engaging in a strategy of nonviolence.

3. 1 - Modelling the Political Situation

Modelling the political situation accurately is very important for political realists. Without an accurate interpretation of the political situation and it will be impossible to guide political agents properly. As Jubb argues, “responding to a political situation then will have to mean responding to its particularities. **Realists must rely on an interpretation of a political situation that captures its specificities**; otherwise, they will be guilty of the universalism and the associated failure to address real political agents for which they criticise moralists” (Jubb, 2017, 118). Geuss states that a question that keeps recurring in our political life is “Who <does> what to whom for whose benefit?” with four distinct variables to be filled in, i.e., (1) Who?, (2) What?, (3) To Whom?, (4) For whose benefit?” (Geuss, 2008, 23). As he states, to think politically “is to think about agency, power, and interests, and the relations among these” (Geuss, 2008, 23). One of the main tasks of political theory (according to realists) is to provide

understanding of real politics or how things “in a given society actually work ... to explain why certain decisions are taken, why certain projects fail and others succeed, or why social and political action exhibits the patterns it does” (Geuss, 2008, 38).

The importance of accurate modelling should be clear when we remember that politics is about managing conflict and disagreement. There is a sense in which we can theorise about how to manage conflict and disagreement in theory. There are books by political scientists in the field of conflict resolution that talk about broad principles and methods that have been successful in previous conflicts. A political agent could read this literature and the historical lessons within this literature to help them manage disagreement. However, when it comes to managing a specific disagreement amongst a group of people, you require information about the particular circumstances you are facing. As Jubb argues “there are no political agents in the abstract, only concrete ones in particular situations” and political realists emphasise the “importance of situated reasoning, which draws on the resources for containing disagreement found in particular circumstances” (Jubb, 2015, 683). To use a simple example, imagine if Bob intentionally and unjustifiably damaged Betty’s car. Betty is understandably angry about this action and signals her willingness to respond with violence. Everyone would accept that a mediator that attempted to prevent this situation from escalating would be bad at their job if they believed that Bob should only offer to pay for the damages inflicted on Betty’s car. Without some recognition of the inconvenience imposed to Betty and an apology, Betty will most likely find the mediator’s attempts to mediate the conflict to be insufficient. Whenever and wherever there is conflict, any political agent who wants to manage disagreement to prevent conflict will need information about who the parties in the disagreement are, what they want, and what types of grievances they have.³⁰

³⁰ One of the disagreements that I have with the political realist position (which will become clearer throughout this thesis) is that it is difficult for me to see that any political moralist would deny this claim. I do not believe political moralists would reject the ethic of responsibility, even if their theories of justice provide very little direct guidance for political agents to act responsibly under circumstances of radical disagreement. This is one of the main arguments I discuss in chapter 5 (the moralist response). For now, when I say something like ‘political realists believe you need contextual information to mediate the conflict between Bob and Betty’, this should not be read as a statement suggesting that political moralists believe that you do not need contextual information for this purpose (although there is a lot of evidence to suggest that this is what political realists are in fact saying). I am merely trying to set out the political realist position as clearly as possible.

The instruments required to manage disagreement also require contextual information. No one can manage collective disagreement by themselves. To successfully manage disagreement, all individuals need to gain power, which means generating the right bases of support. This means that in the process of attracting allies, you need to know what people want. As mentioned in chapter 1, in many cases, principles and ideals will play this role. Many coalitions emerge from and are maintained by, shared principles and ideals. However, this will not be enough. People with shared goals might disagree about how to interpret, prioritise, and implement those shared ideals. Sometimes, the amount of support from people with shared principles will not be enough. What these disagreements might be, how you might 'buy' support in these circumstances, and what types of compromises need to be made, all require more contextual information. For example, during the 2016 presidential election, Donald Trump revealed a list of potential Supreme Court nominees, something that is not typically done by presidential candidates. Most evangelical Christians did not support Trump when he announced his candidacy. Their hesitation was understandable; not only were there doubts about Trump's faith, but his personal life has also shown that even if he was a religious individual, he did not live according to the standards of the Christian faith. However, during the 2016 election, "evangelical voters coalesced around him as a presidential candidate, many citing his promise to appoint Supreme Court justices who would overturn *Roe v. Wade*" (Bailey, 2016). While there are many explanations for why Trump won the evangelical vote, this example shows that the Trump campaign knew what it had to do to get voters who would generally not support a candidate like Trump to vote for him.

Laswell argued that politics is "who gets what, when, how" (Laswell, 1936). In a similar vein, as mentioned before, Geuss claims that an important recurring question in politics is the question "Who <does> what to whom for whose benefit?" (Geuss, 2008, 23). It is claims like these that imply that politics is only about the pursuit of self-interest and gain. Political scientists sometimes analyse political agents' behaviour in these terms. Public choice is a school of thought that "asks us to make the same assumptions about human behaviour in the political sphere as we make when we analyse markets ... if self-interest gives rise to certain outcomes in markets which some believe cause problems that politicians should try to fix, should we not assume that these same forces of self-interest exist within political systems that try to 'correct' market failure?" (Butler, 2012,

11-12). One important incentive that political scientists keep in mind when analysing the behaviour of politicians is political survival. Policies that are good for most people might be bad for the political survival of leaders.³¹ These concerns tend to be excluded from moral deliberation about how power should be used under ideal circumstances. However, responsible theorists of politics should not just model politics purely on self-interested short-term considerations. This modelling would be too limited to be useful. There are many political agents who are motivated by more than just their short-term self-interest. There are politicians who ‘live for’ politics, which means they fight for a cause; they have a ‘depth of conviction’ that provides them with the inner strength to continue fighting in difficult political struggle (Cohen, 2011). Some activists fight for causes their entire lives, even though they know that there is very little chance of success during their lifetime. We should remember Williams’s claim that he wants “a broader view of the content of politics, not confined to interest, together with a more realistic view of the powers, opportunities, and limitations of political actors, where all the considerations that bear on political action – both ideals and, for example, political survival – can come to one focus of decision” (*IBWD*, 12). Modelling the situation accurately requires all the relevant considerations that really bear on political action to be taken into consideration. This includes political ideals, but also concerns of political survival that political scientists tend to focus on.

The need to know contextual information to manage disagreement (and know what tools are needed to successfully manage disagreement) is one of the main reasons why political realists theorise about legitimacy in the way that they do. Political realists find something problematic about universalistic standards of political legitimacy that political moralists typically hold. Political realists will tend to cite Dworkin’s work on equality and its relation to political legitimacy as an example of what they find problematic about how political moralists approach legitimacy (Jubb, 2017). Dworkin argues that “no government is legitimate that does not show equal concern for the fate of all those citizens over whom it claims dominion and from whom it claims allegiance. Equal concern is the sovereign virtue of political community – without it government is only tyranny” (Dworkin, 2000, 1). It might be the best moral standard from which we

³¹ For example, a politician might put more regulatory burdens on polluting companies, which leads to polluting companies to give large campaign donations to the opponents of that politician.

should judge and evaluate political institutions and their legitimacy. However, as a principle, it can be a poor guide for political agents who want to answer the First Political Question. In other words, the moralistic principle is a poor guide for people who have to resolve disagreement in the *de facto* sense. Imagine a society with a majority population who is anti-Semitic, with a minority Jewish population. If a political agent attempted to answer the First Political Question sustainably by claiming that they would treat everyone with equal concern and respect, they would be unlikely to be successful. The majority anti-Semitic population will most likely settle for an answer to the First Political Question that heavily discriminates against the minority Jewish population (imagine that the Jewish population is too small to have any power to prevent this answer by the majority population). In this situation, Dworkin's claim seems nothing more than "bluff and brow-beating" which is "useless and do not help one to understand anything" (Williams, 1995, 43 and *IBWD*, 10). If a political agent with access to the levers of power tried to establish a legitimate state (in the Dworkinian sense), they would fail to answer the First Political Question. It might lead to a situation where they would lose access to the levers of power and be replaced by someone who is truly anti-Semitic. No matter how attractive the moral principle might be, if it cannot resolve disagreement in a *de facto* sense, it will not help political agents in the difficult circumstances that they face. As Williams argues "it is a necessary condition of legitimacy that the state solve the first question" (*IBWD*, 3).

On a similar note, political realists also believe that, due to the radical disagreement that is constitutive of politics, the way that political moralists discuss legitimacy is too simplistic. Simmons subscribes "to political voluntarism as the correct account of ... legitimacy" (Simmons, 1999, 769). However, "no actual states satisfy the requirements of this voluntarism" which means that Simmons argues that "no existing states are legitimate" (Simmons, 1999, 769). There are at least two issues political realists have against this view of legitimacy. Firstly, political realists believe that in any real political situation, there are many reasons why different people could perceive the state as legitimate. Some might sincerely believe the legitimization story provided by the government. Others might adhere to the laws laid by the state because they know that they are too weak to fight back; they have prudential reasons to treat the state as legitimate. The diversity of reasons that real citizens have to accept the authority of a sovereign that has answered the First Political Question leads political realists to believe

that we should “accept that the considerations that support LEG [legitimacy] are scalar, and the binary cut LEG/ILLEG [Legitimacy/Illegitimacy] is artificial” (*IBWD*, 10). Whether the Basic Legitimation Demand is satisfied in practice is a scalar verdict, “with judgment required as to whether the state in question can reasonably be said to be legitimate overall” (Sagar, 2018, 117). Realists argue that “an important upshot of Williams’s analysis ... is that because legitimacy is scalar and its ascription dependent on judgment, it is quite coherent from his internalist perspective to say that the same state can be both legitimate and illegitimate to different groups of people at the same time. Indeed, this is one important way in which internalist views will tend to differ from externalist accounts, which typically posit that insofar as some key value or criteria is violated, then the state is rendered illegitimate simpliciter” (Sagar, 2018, 118). Secondly, as Hall argues “legitimacy ceases to be a meaningful standard of evaluation as no political society has been, or will be, legitimate (it is like claiming that tallness is morally significant but that all men are short because they are not giants.) This does not accord with our considered use of the term: after all, it makes sense to hold that, for example, Assad’s Syria is less legitimate than David Cameron’s Great Britain.” (Hall, 2015, 479).³²

Finally, although modelling the political situation is important for guiding political agents, modelling is not only for political strategising. Modelling the political situation is also important for political realists due to their belief that politics is a genuine solution to a problem. Williams believes that it is an axiom of politics that might does not make right. As mentioned before, another axiom that Williams derives from his account of

³² This is of course an inaccurate interpretation of Simmons’s view on legitimacy. Simmons states that “no existing states are legitimate (simpliciter)” (Simmons, 2001, 156). He continues to argue that “States become more legitimate as they more closely approach the ideal of voluntary association, but no existing states are legitimate with respect to even a majority of their subjects. That all states are illegitimate in this sense, however, does not imply that all states are equally bad. States can be more or less fully illegitimate and, hence, violate rights more or less widely and severely. And while all illegitimate states do wrong in seizing a monopoly on force to which they have no right, some illegitimate states are in addition hopelessly evil, while others are decent and benevolent.” (Simmons, 2001, 156). Hall might have a point in saying that this is not how we use the term legitimacy in today’s political discourse. He might also be right in saying that legitimacy in the voluntaristic sense is not a meaningful standard of evaluation as no state has been or will be legitimate (although more needs to be said about what it means to have a meaningful standard). However, Simmons can make the claim that Britain is more legitimate than Syria because it ‘more closely approaches the ideal of voluntary association’ (Simmons, 2001, 156). Simmons would also insist that they are not ‘equally bad’. The Syrian government engages in far more unjustifiable and egregious actions compared to the British government.

politics is the Critical Theory Principle. We can go back to the *Tyrant* case I discussed in the previous chapter to develop how we can use this principle to theorise about politics responsibly.

Tyrant – Imagine a ruthless tyrant managed to obtain a monopoly of violence within a specific political community. Any form of dissent from the will of this dictator is repressed quickly and mercilessly. All forms of information and education that exists in this community are geared towards ‘brainwashing’ individuals in the community to believe that the dictator does in fact have the right to rule over their community (because it is ‘natural’ for them to do so, or that it is God’s will that they do so).

In the *Tyrant* case, everyone in the political community believes that the ruthless dictator is a legitimate political authority. One explanation for why this might be the case is that everyone in this community genuinely or voluntarily accepts the legitimisation story provided by the Tyrant. However, this is an unlikely explanation. It is much more plausible to believe that one of the main reasons why the people regard this tyrant as authoritative is the comprehensive brainwashing programme that the tyrant has established in this community. This suggests that the main (if not the only) reason why people regard the dictator as authoritative is because of the use of power by the dictator. Williams argues that “the acceptance of a justification does not count if the acceptance itself is produced by the coercive power which is supposedly being justified” (*IBWD*, 6). This sounds intuitive at first. If we are to consider politics to be a genuine solution to a problem (and not the replacement of a problem with another problem), we need also to remove cases of false consciousness that can easily emerge under conditions of power and coercion. It is for this reason that Williams does not believe that everyone accepting the legitimisation story provided by the authority is a necessary or sufficient condition for a situation to be considered political, “because people can be drilled by coercive power itself into accepting its exercise” (*IBWD*, 6).

We can refer to this form of modelling the political situation broadly as ‘ideological analysis’.³³ There is a large literature on the relationship between ideology and political

³³ Of course, ideological analysis is a very broad term. What I described in the previous paragraph was much more focused on the beliefs of citizens regarding the authoritative nature of the Tyrant. However, political institutions play a significant role in generating ideologies. Maynard

theory. A full analysis of this literature would be outside of the scope of this thesis. However, I do not find it surprising that many of the prominent figures in the literature on ideology and political theory, such as Michael Freeden, Raymond Geuss, and Quentin Skinner, are either political realists, or are sympathetic to the political realist position. Maynard defines a political ideology as “a distinctive overarching system of normative and/or reputedly factual ideas, typically shared by members of groups or organizations, which shapes their understandings of their political world and guides their political behaviour.” (Maynard, 2017, 300). Political realists insist that “no human being can engage in some kind of perfectly rational disembodied reflection about politics that simply ‘sees the world as it is’ uninfluenced by prior thinking. Instead, every individual’s political thinking occurs via networks of values, meanings, narratives, theories, assumptions, concepts, expectations, exemplars, past experiences, images, stereotypes and beliefs about matters of fact already existing in their mind” (Maynard, 2017, 300). It is important to understand the social world in which normative theorising is occurring because ideology in this sense is inescapable. Knowing whether a political authority is considered legitimate by its citizens due to the power of the authority is difficult. Few real-world cases resemble the blatant conditions of the *Tyrant* case. North Korea’s dictatorial regime might be the only example. In many cases, it can be very difficult to determine when beliefs are in fact products of false consciousness due to coercion and domination. Williams also recognises that “power will *always* be present in the creation of beliefs for socially embedded subjects” (Sagar, 2018, 119).

Of course, merely because something is ideological does not mean that it is (morally or politically) problematic. For example, imagine a society where people believe (consciously or subconsciously) that free market principles are much more efficient and effective in delivering goods for people compared to principles of central planning. A group of libertarians succeed in answering the First Political Question and provide a legitimisation story for their position of power that states that they are making people’s lives better because they are instituting free market principles. Citizens of this society accept this legitimisation story because they live in a social world that is conducive to

argues that one of the important tasks of ideological analysis is to “diagnose the normative failings of existing *political institutions* by illustrating the problematic ideologies they generate” (Maynard, 2017, 304). I believe political realists are generally interested in ideological analysis in the broad sense, even if their main concern is with beliefs about authority.

libertarianism. If someone found something about this example problematic, more needs to be said about why there is something problematic other than the fact that the legitimisation story is accepted due to the prevalent ideology in this society. Williams introduces a test for “a belief held by a group: If they were to understand properly how they came to hold this belief, would they give it up?” (Williams, 2002, 226-227). This is one of the clearest standards that Williams has set out for the Critical Theory Principle. When modelling any political situation to see if a political authority is in fact legitimate, this is one of the questions they would ask about the citizens who accept the legitimisation story of the sovereign. Asking this question can lead to disadvantaged groups questioning the cause of their beliefs. If they recognise that the main cause of their beliefs are the instructions of a more advantaged group (and they recognise that there is also no clear independent reason for why they should continue to believe those beliefs), the disadvantaged group will start to question the authority of ‘the instructors’ of the advantaged group. As Williams describes the “more the instructors . . . resist the objections to the status quo, as they no doubt will, the more obvious it becomes that the system is unjust in the most basic terms, an exercise of unmediated power. To the extent that it is defended by overt coercion, this is what it will have become. But there is good reason to say also that this is what it always was” (Williams, 2002, 230).

Some go so far as to state that this ideological analysis is what allows political realists to be radical and avoid status quo bias. Political realists argue that political theorists should be more attuned to the facts and constraints of real politics. However, “there appears to be a trade-off between a theory’s groundedness in facts about the status quo and its ability to consistently envisage radical departures from the status quo” (Rossi and Prinz, 2017, 348). Finlayson argues that “realism will inevitably tend to nudge us towards a greater acceptance of the status quo, towards more modesty in the change that we are prepared to propose or demand” (Finlayson, 2017, 271). Erman and Möller have an entire paper dedicated to rebutting what they call the ‘low bar conclusion’, which they define as “a rather pessimistic view of what we may rightfully demand of political authorities in terms of legitimacy”, which they argue is a “common denominator of recent proposals suggested by political realists” (Erman and Möller, 2018, 525). However, some political realists argue that this modelling process to know what forms of beliefs we see in the real world are ideological in a problematic way can help significantly transform those societies. As Rossi and Prinz argue “realism as ideology

critique fuses diagnosis and critique so as to improve our grasp of the relationship between social reality and social norms” (Rossi and Prinz, 2017, 362). This is done by “checking particular claims to authority or legitimising rationales against their own aspirations”, which is a good basis for “generating criteria against which to evaluate the use of concepts and relations of power in a social order. The critical distance needed in order to become clear about the current order needs to be wrested from a diagnosis of the status quo in which understanding and critique are intertwined” (Rossi and Prinz, 2017, 362). Whether this process is as radical as Rossi and Prinz suggest is outside the scope of this thesis. I mention this claim to show how ideological analysis is not meant to be purely descriptive. It can play a critical role in the process of determining the legitimacy of a political (or even epistemic) authority.

It is important to note that it is not just political realists who are interested in the relationship between political authority and the generation of beliefs amongst their citizenry. Just to mention one example, there is a significant literature on civic education and whether civic education is problematic for political liberals. Brighouse describes the problem best when he states that liberals proclaim that “justice must not only be done but must be freely affirmed by the citizens whose behaviour the liberal state aspires to regulate”, which means there is something “puzzling about the idea that liberal states may regulate the educational curriculum by mandating a civic education aimed at inculcating the values on which liberalism is based and behaviours which sustain it. If the state helps form the political loyalties of future citizens by inculcating belief in its own legitimacy, it will be unsurprising when citizens consent to the social institutions they inhabit, but it will be difficult to be confident that their consent is freely given, or would have been freely given.” (Brighouse, 1998, 719). It might be true that theorists engaging in the civic education literature tend to commit the cardinal “sin of *acontextualism*”, because they are engaging with the theoretical question of what a hypothetical ideal liberal state should do when it comes to civic education (Maynard, 2017, 313). This brings us back to the importance of contextualism when it comes to theorising about politics responsibly. However, it would be wrong to believe that political moralists are unaware of the role that political authorities can have on the generation and cultivation of beliefs amongst their citizens.

While this is not specifically about modelling the political situation, political realists have insisted on the importance of understanding what ‘really’ motivates human beings to act in politics. Geuss argued that being a realist means “roughly speaking, that [we] must start from and be concerned in the first instance not with how people ought ideally (or ought ‘rationally’) to act, what they ought to desire, or value, the kind of people they ought to be, etc., but, rather, with ... what really does move human beings to act in given circumstances.” (Geuss, 2008, 9). Political realists argue that this is what prominent theorists in the history of political thought did, and the focus on justice in contemporary political theory has diverted us away from this traditional focus. As Pettit argues “Many of the classic texts in political theory, from Machiavelli’s Discourses to Montesquieu’s Spirit of the Laws...to Mill’s Considerations on Representative Government deal with how institutions should be ordered in the real world of parochial bias, limited resources, and institutional and psychological pathology ... [I]t is little short of scandalous that this area of work is hardly ever emulated by political philosophers today” (Pettit, quoted in Galston, 2010, 394). According to Galston, contemporary political theorists have only focused on the “dyad of justice and self-interest (or, in Rawls’s later parlance, the reasonable and the rational)”, which ignores the fact that “when passions surge, even self-interest gives way” (Galston, 2018, 95-97). One of the main ways in which a political theorist can be ‘more realistic’ about human behaviour is by engaging “fully with the passions and emotions – not only mild and benign sentiments but also their harsher cousins such as rage and the desire for revenge.” (Galston, 2018, 97).

3. 2 - Guiding Political Agents

As mentioned before, the second important task for political realists is to guide political agents make ‘responsible’ decisions. One of the most important steps in this task is to have an honest reflection on power: who has it, how much a particular political agent has, how they can obtain and maintain it. We can start the discussion of how to guide political agents by describing the way that political realists such as Williams have framed the issue. I am only partially sympathetic with the way that political realists have described the positions of their opponents. I will show what parts of the description I agree and disagree with at the end of this section.

The easiest way to understand what theorising about politics responsibly has to do with power can be seen in what Williams rejects. Many people associated with political realism have argued that political theory has ‘displaced’ politics (Honig, 1993 and Newey, 2000). Williams argues that much moralistic political philosophy argues in a way “that the *others* are not there” (*IBWD*, 58). We can see what it means to displace or avoid politics in his discussion of power.

Williams makes a distinction between the audience and the listener of a work of political philosophy. He states “we have to distinguish between, on the one hand, people who may be expected or hoped actually to read and be influenced by such a text [the audience], and the people or person whom, in terms of its content, it purports to address” (*IBWD*, 56). The relationship between these two agents is complex for any work of philosophy. In simple cases, such as Edmund Burke’s address to the electors of Bristol, the audience and the listener coincide. However, there are many other cases in which they might diverge. Take Machiavelli’s *The Prince* as an example. It is not written directly as a letter to a prince. However, Williams argues “it can be read as a third-personal version of such a thing, a text which is presented as something which a prince would specially profit from reading. Its intended actual audience ... consist of the people whom Machiavelli thought could be instructed in the nature of politics and its relations to virtue by reading a text which says those things about princes in a way that purports to provide instruction to a prince” (*IBWD*, 56-7).

Williams argues that Rawls’s audience is “the concerned and well-disposed citizenry of a modern pluralist state” (*IBWD*, 57). However, the listener of moralistic political philosophy (and Williams singles out Rawls and Dworkin here) generally does not resemble the audience, particularly regarding their level of power. According to Williams, the listeners tend to be founding fathers or very powerful and patient supreme courts; both of whom have “fewer purely political restrictions on what they do than politicians generally do” (*IBWD*, 58). When questioning the relationship between political philosophy and democratic politics, Rawls explicitly claims that “in a regime with judicial review, political philosophy tends to have a larger public role, at least in constitutional issues concerning basic rights and liberties of democratic citizenship” (Rawls, 2007, 5). Outside of judicial review, Rawls claims that political philosophy plays

more of an educational role.³⁴ Concerned citizens might read political philosophy as it is today and gain a better understanding of their considered judgments. However, it would provide little understanding of politics, and how to achieve those ideals under the circumstances of radical disagreement. This disjointed relationship between the audience and the listener in political philosophy “alienates politics from political philosophy” because it “addresses a listener who is supposedly empowered to enact just what such considerations enjoin. And no actual audience, no audience in the world, is in that situation, not even the Supreme Court” (*IBWD*, 58).³⁵

To theorise about politics in a way that does not displace politics, we have to theorise in terms of realistic power constraints and opportunities that different political agents might have. There needs to be a sense of political contest against other political agents, reintroduced to political philosophy when theorising about politics responsibly. At this stage, someone might respond that one of the best examples of theorising about politics responsibly, namely *The Prince*, seems to address an empowered listener (a prince). If a supreme court as a listener is problematic, surely a prince is as well. Why is the listener of *The Prince* acceptable for political realists but the listener for *A Theory of Justice* is not? Williams argues that these are disanalogous cases because there is no displacement of politics; there is no alienation of politics from political philosophy in *The Prince*. This is because *The Prince* “serves to remind its listener of the existence of politics ... it takes

³⁴ Education for the sake of politics might be viable option in the long run. However, we have to make decisions here and now, amongst people who disagree. Political philosophers also tend to avoid using rhetoric as they would prefer to rely on the strength of their arguments. However, rhetoric can be a much more powerful tool in engaging with radical disagreement and generating support in political discourse.

³⁵ I am unsympathetic to Williams’s idea that Rawls and Dworkin are addressing an omnipotent listener. I am even less sympathetic to the idea that Rawls and Dworkin are unaware of the fact that no actual audience in the world is in the situation, not even the Supreme Court. Imagine if I said that the question I am interested in is the question ‘what would a set of ideal and just institutions look like?’ And I said I wanted to know the answer to that question because I wanted to know the proper basis of evaluating how unjust today’s institutions are. I know going from where we are now to the institutions I have designed in theory is going to be very difficult. It probably will not happen in my life time. But I am interested in the question nonetheless, because it is important for me to know what justice demands. Does that mean that I am addressing a listener who is omnipotent and am somehow ignorant of the fact that no one is omnipotent? My disagreement here is not devastating to Williams’s desire for an ethic of responsibility. However, I did want to note that I find the desire that some political realists have to show how political moralists are almost ignorant of basic facts about politics to be quite frustrating at times. As I will show in future chapters, it would be more charitable to argue that political realists and moralists are not enemies with intractable disagreements and are instead simply asking different questions with different levels of context and idealisation.

seriously power and the surrounding distributions and limitations on power in any given situation” (*IBWD*, 59). At almost every stage of Machiavelli’s work, the discussion is on how the prince can maintain power under the circumstances of politics. This suggests that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with there being a gap (of power) between the audience and the listener for theorising about politics responsibly. But if there is no sense of political contest, no discussion of the distribution and limitation on power, and no discussion about the struggle for power when talking to an empowered listener, politics can be said to be displaced from political philosophy. We can think of this as an important element of the ethic of responsibility. When acting in politics (or making normative recommendations about how a political agent should act), they need to understand the constraints that politics imposes upon them. One of the main constraints is the amount of power they have and how others will react to your use of power in the struggle for power.

Guiding political agents under these political circumstances requires an in-depth analysis of what options are available for any political agent along with a clear account of what the likely consequences of each option are. When political agents choose a path, it is a case of “opting for A *rather than* B” (Geuss, 2008, 30). This means that once an option is chosen, the model we have just created has changed, sometimes for good, which obviously complicates the task for political agents (Geuss, 2008, 31). They need to be careful about what they prioritise, and when they decide to choose an option, because to be successful in large-scale collective endeavours, “a delicate judgment about what is realistically possible at what point in time” and “seeing when the time is ripe for action and grasping opportunities” is crucial for any good political agent (Geuss, 2008, 31). It is important to note that it is this constant changing of the model that makes theorising about politics so difficult. Political realists place a lot of importance on political action. As Jubb argues, even if the title of Williams’s book was chosen by his editors rather than by Williams himself, “it is obviously no accident that the posthumous collection containing RMPT [Realism and Moralism in Political Theory] is called *In the Beginning Was the Deed*. Williams treats that dictum from Goethe’s *Faust* as a reminder that politics is about action and so will often escape our attempts to model or predict it

because of the way its participants' acts will transform it, including by creating the conditions of their own success." (Jubb, 2017, 117).³⁶

Political realists want to guide political agents to act with good political judgment. This requires a sense of proportionality and an understanding of the likely consequences. Political agents must avoid what Weber refers to as an 'ethic of ultimate ends', which "he discusses predominantly with regard to ... the injunctions of the Christian religion", which "are absolute, they admit no exception, and, as such, they are unconcerned with the consequences of conduct" (Philp, 2007, 81). Instead, political realists argue that "political reasoning is not a matter of applying normative judgments to determinate actions. It involves applying consequential analysis to interdependent actions. Towards that end, it proceeds by factual observation and counter-factual evaluation. It is constantly obliged to conjure, project and assess historical probabilities ... political judgment trades in probabilities" (Bourke, 2009, 100-101).

We might consider acting responsibly as trying to attain the right balance among a wide range of demands that at times seems incompatible. Political agents need to have a healthy dose of realism about what the situation is and what types of options are available to them to generate collective action successfully. However, they need to have the passion and integrity of character and commitment and not be distracted merely by greed, hubris, and vanity. Political agents must maintain a strong commitment to a cause, but they also need to recognise that there is a perverse relationship between intentions and outcomes in politics. Sheer luck and contingency play a large role in politics and political outcomes, "and that contingency provides powerful reasons for placing the greatest weight on the avoidance of certain consequences- certain types of harm or conflict –as a basic ethical demand in politics" (Philp, 2007, 90). Finally, political agents sometimes need a degree of ruthlessness in order to succeed in the struggle for power. As Philp argues, "the person may have acted ruthlessly, but it is possible to do so with a sense of proportion, responsibility, and passion" (Philp, 2007, 91). To sum up, political agents need to make difficult decisions based on a clear

³⁶ I show in the Chapter 7 of this thesis that the Wittgensteinian idea of 'in the beginning was the deed' plays a more fundamental role in the metaethical and metaphysical views of political realists.

understanding of what the political situation demands, to see them through with the necessary means, and to accept responsibility for the outcomes of those decisions.

3. 3 - Political Institutions – A Realistic Liberalism?

So far, most of the discussion has been about guiding the actions of agents. Very little of my discussion has been about designing or evaluating political institutions, which suggests that political realism is much more concerned with the ethics of political agents rather than the ethics of institutions. I believe it is true that political realists are generally more interested in the actions of individual political agents. What political realists find problematic with a lot of moralistic political philosophy is the fact that there is too much discussion about what ideal institutions would look like and very little ‘realistic’ discussion of how we (as individual political agents with limited power) could get there. Furthermore, political realists care a lot about political strategy because they are focused on issues of collective action. They tend to accept the lessons of game theory, which state that “in situations of collective action we cannot choose outcomes, only strategies” (Sabl, 2011, 154). As Hardin explains “in philosophical action theory, the actions are simple ones such as flipping a switch to turn on a light. In real life, our most important actions are not so simple. They are inherently interactions. We have reasons for taking our actions, but our reasons may not finally be reflected in the results of our actions even if hope for specific results is our reason for our choice of actions” (Hardin, 2003, 2-3). The outcomes of collective action are the result of the interaction of multiple strategies from multiple people, which means that depending “on what you do, I may do very well or very badly” (Hardin, 2003, 3). Sabl argues “doing what we wish everyone would do, or what we ‘value’ is often no more likely to achieve the collective result that we would prefer than flapping one’s arms is likely to produce flight” (Sabl, 2011, 155).

There has been some discussion of institutions by political realists, and we can consider this to be the third task of theorising about politics responsibly. It is important to theorise about institutions with an ethic of responsibility. This means remembering the constitutive features of politics when designing institutions and evaluating them. Due to the collective nature of action, “how a social institution will respond to diverse and clashing efforts and demands is difficult to predict” (Sabl, 2017, 369-370). There will be unintended consequences in any form of social and political change. This is one of the

reasons why political realists tend to advocate institutions that avoid the worst outcomes. The most famous example of this is what Judith Shklar referred to as the Liberalism of Fear, which states that “liberalism’s deepest grounding is in place from the first, in the conviction of the earliest defenders of toleration, born in horror, that cruelty is an absolute evil, an offense against God or humanity. It is out of that tradition that the political liberalism of fear arose and continues amid the terror of our time to have relevance” (Shklar, 1989, 23). Shklar argues that only the Liberalism of Fear is sensitive to our history. She states, “we say ‘never again,’ but somewhere someone is being tortured right now, and acute fear has again become the most common form of social control. To this the horror of modern warfare must be added as a reminder. The liberalism of fear is a response to these undeniable actualities, and it therefore concentrates on damage control” (Shklar, 1989, 27). While not all political realists are liberals, I believe it is safe to say that realists who are liberals have tended to follow Shklar in advocating some form of nonutopian Liberalism of Fear (*IBWD*, 52 and Sleat, 2013). A lot of my previous discussion in this chapter will apply here as well. For example, it is important for the design of ‘realistic’ institutions to be geared towards an accurate account of human motivation. They should be designed in a way that curtails the worst elements of human behaviour. A good example of this is a “constitutionalist doctrine that checks and balances” which are “instrumentally necessary to liberty” because powerful people will try to skew the distribution of benefits from institutions to their favour (Sabl, 2017, 377).

To the best of my knowledge, there are mainly two prominent examples of realistic institutional design. Andrew Sabl and Matt Sleat have provided accounts of realist liberalism. For Sleat, the important feature of realist liberalism is to recognise its own partisan foundations. We start with the constitutive features of politics, which is pluralism. Realist liberals take “it to be a fact that politics must address. A liberal account of pluralism ... need not celebrate diversity and disagreement for its own sake. But it cannot regret it either. It cannot be viewed as an unfortunate aspect of social life that needs to be overcome. After all, liberalism is committed to the notion that people are able to adopt their own diverse life plans and should be free as possible to pursue those (consistent with others having the same degree of freedom)” (Sleat, 2013, 133). Sleat (along with other political realists) also argues that reasonable disagreement applies not just to conceptions of the good, but also to conceptions of justice as well. In debates

about Rawlsian Political Liberalism, this is referred to as the Asymmetry Objection. Fowler and Stemplowska define it as “the doctrine – in allowing legitimate state action on justice but not the good life – treats disagreement about justice and about the good life in an arbitrarily asymmetric way ... both justice and human flourishing are subject to reasonable disagreement and there is no principled way to allow legitimate state action in pursuit of justice but not in the pursuit of the good” (Fowler and Stemplowska, 2015, 133). As Sleat argues “while Rawls seemed to limit (at least implicitly the scope of reasonable disagreement about justice to disagreement between those who hold reasonable conceptions, i.e. those consistent with reciprocity, there is no good reason why the burdens [of judgment] cannot offer an equally plausible explanation as to the origin and nature of conflict between liberals and non-liberals also” (Sleat, 2013, 134).

This leads Sleat to argue that, rather than being one objective moral answer to politics, we have to recognise that “liberalism is but one player, or indeed family of players, in the struggle for power that is politics ... Liberalism is a partisan political position grounded on contestable and contested normative values” (Sleat, 2013, 137). Of course, this does not mean that liberals “must refrain from making universal claims, such as ‘the world would be a safer or more just place if all states were essentially liberal’ ... liberals can and should take their own side in an argument” (Sleat, 2013, 137). However, political realists argue that liberals “must admit ... that liberalism has many genuine and sincere enemies many of whose rejection of liberal politics, and endorsement of anti-liberal alternatives, will be reasonable ... such persons will hold their beliefs with the same passion, commitment and possibly certainty of their truth as liberals hold their own. And they do so because, as the burdens of judgment emphasise, moral and political questions are amongst the most difficult that humans have to grapple with” (Sleat, 2013, 137). Presumably, if we lived in a Marxist world, a political realist would also argue that it is a partisan political position grounded on contestable and contested normative values. Recognising the partisan nature of the justification of institutions is an important element of the third task of theorising about politics responsibly.

Sabl also rejects the possibility or desirability of resting “society or politics on a normative consensus. Complex, differentiated modern societies lack such a consensus” (Sabl, 2017, 368). However, he does think that “fortunately, liberal and democratic institutions do not require either thick or thin consensus on the level of political

principle” (Sabl, 2017, 368). He goes further than Sleat by arguing that because “liberals value diversity, experimentation, and freedom of thought”, the level of diversity we see in our ethical lives is “something to be welcomed, not lamented” (Sabl, 2017, 368). He argues that neither “politics nor political theory requires ‘regulative ideals’: principles, derived from systematic philosophy, that are allegedly necessary to orient common action and to motivate social and political progress ... the motivational force [of social movements] has never required that they form a coherent philosophical system” (Sabl, 2017, 368). Instead, we should see liberal institutions as operating by “managing conflict and diversity rather than assuming (or seeking) ethical agreement” and “involves steady improvement, either through experimental learning within a given society or – more commonly – through a tendency to borrow best practices from elsewhere” (Sabl, 2017, 370-371). We should see liberal institutions drawing their value in theory and practice “from [their] ability in a rough sense to *promote the interests of all members of society*” and whether it promotes “indefinite and multiple values and purposes rather than giving exclusive priority to any one” (Sabl, 2017, 371). To the extent that it fails to do so, there should be “*demands for reform, on that basis*” (Sabl, 2017, 371). In this sense, political realists tend to see institutions as not being “*produced by a deliberate plan, nor supported by an ex-post consensus regarding its purpose*. [They] often though not necessarily, arise as the consequences of acts by agents who would not have favoured the way the institution ends up working” (Sabl, 2017, 372). This is one of the reasons why we should be so careful when engaging in reform and criticism of these institutions. It is possible that the origins and persistence of existing institutions are for counter-intuitive reasons in the sense that “they initially seem to endanger a variety of human interests that experience later shows them to promote” (Sabl, 2017, 372). A theorist who is not careful and has no historical knowledge of how these institutions emerged (and why they persist) will act irresponsibly when recommending reform of existing institutions based on their preferred theory of justice.

There is a lot I disagree with in this description of analysing political institutions from a political realist perspective. Even if the Asymmetry Objection is true, this does not necessarily mean that we should consider a liberal (either political or comprehensive) to be on the same partisan footing as a Nietzschean, if by liberal we mean someone who has “fundamental concern to respect all persons’ moral equality” (Sleat, 2013, 136). It is true that “not all persons are committed to freedom and equality” and that others

“might value freedom and equality but give priority to other values” (Sleat, 2013, 136-7). However, there needs to be more argument to suggest that we should treat them as equally partisan positions from a moral perspective. With regards to Sabl’s approach to institutions, it seems as if he is engaging in some form of sociological analysis that has normative implications for reforming existing institutions. That is fine but does not necessarily mean that there is a problem with engaging in systematic philosophy. I think it is plausible to say that the motivational force of social change tends not to come from systematic philosophy and that “aspirations to rigorous reasoning and comprehensive scope are rarely consistent with the passion and rhetoric that can animate change” (Sabl, 2017, 368). However, it is not clear why these are reasons to reject the provision of a regulative ideal or a systematic political theory. Ultimately, while there has not been a lot written regarding institutional design and evaluation, political realists believe it is important to see institutions in a realistic sense, and ensure that they are designed in a way that keeps the constitutive features of politics in mind.

3. 4 - The ‘Ultimate Ends’ of Politics and Political Agents

Are there certain political ends that all responsible political agents should pursue? Political realists tend not to talk about the ultimate ends that political agents should pursue when they are engaging in politics. To a certain extent, this is understandable. There are many different ends that political agents can pursue. If political realists start with the assumption of radical disagreement, it would be strange to argue that all political agents do or should pursue the same aims. The same circumstances of disagreement would also make it impossible to say that everyone should pursue the same ends because everyone would disagree on what those ends should be. However, it would be implausible to believe that any end is acceptable for a political realist. If a political realist believed that any end of a political agent was acceptable for them, they would have to accept that we should treat a political agent pursuing a pro-Nazi agenda the same as someone trying to achieve social justice. The political realist would simply be engaging in a form of means-ends reasoning. In other words, political realists would not care what the end being pursued was, as long as they pursued those goals in a way that was politically savvy. I do not believe political realists believe this, and if any political realist did believe this, we should quickly reject their position as implausible. This

section aims to discuss some of the political ends responsibly political agents should pursue by examining claims made by both contemporary political realists and by theorists in the history of political thought traditionally associated with political realism, namely Machiavelli and Weber.

Machiavelli often talks about the importance of worldly glory in his discussion of what a prince should desire. It sounds quite militaristic or even anachronistic for us to advocate worldly glory in today's world. However, there are several features of worldly glory that can still be considered relevant for the contemporary political realist. A prince who loves power simply for the sake of loving power is “‘deceived by a false good or a false glory’ and turns to tyranny (Owen, 2017, 44). Machiavelli was particularly critical of Caesar's reign. He believed that people were distracted by his “fortune and awed by the duration of the empire” (Machiavelli, cited in Owen, 2017, 44).³⁷ However, Caesar was undeserving of glory because he destroyed the republic, and in doing so, undermined the security and well-being of his citizens. If a political leader wishes for true glory rather than false glory, “he ought to desire to possess a corrupt city – not to spoil it entirely as did Caesar but to reorder it as did Romulus. And truly the heavens cannot give to men a greater opportunity for glory, nor can men desire any greater” (Machiavelli, cited in Owen, 2017, 45).

Worldly glory comes from the establishment and maintenance of a state. Establishing a state is difficult and requires a ruthlessness that traditionally virtuous individuals do not have. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli discusses examples of great founders such as Moses, Romulus, and Theseus, but in the same vein, he talks favourably about the successes of ordinary tyrants in establishing a state, such as Hiero of Syracuse. This is because they had the character and disposition to act ruthlessly and “to come to power and rule by force and fraud” (Mansfield and Tarcov, 1996, xx). However, when it comes to the maintenance of a state, which is what a prince truly needs for glory that outlasts his life, a different set of skills and circumstances become valuable. In the *Discourse on Levy*, Machiavelli claims that Republics are far more favourable than principalities. He believes “the multitude is wiser and more constant than a prince”; a multitude of people

³⁷ He also implies that people who wrote favourably about Caesar during his reign were unfree to say what they really thought about him. He states that “ruling under that name, did not permit writers to speak freely of him ... he should also see with how much praise they celebrate Brutus, as though unable to blame Caesar because of his power, they celebrate his enemy” (D I.10).

acting together in orderly circumstances are more stable and have better judgment than princes (D I 58.3). In Republics, governments tend to act in favour of the common good, whereas dictators are incentivised to act in a way that benefits themselves, which tends to go against the common good.³⁸ For these reasons, in the *Discourses*, Machiavelli states that “a republic has greater life and has good fortune longer than a principality” and in return, citizens of a republic praise their republican founders (D III 9.2). As Benner argues “The most virtuoso prince is thus one who makes himself redundant qua prince in the usual monarchical sense. Voluntary self-elimination is the most logical means of achieving a reflectively prudent prince’s ends... Princely rule defeats itself unless it transcends itself” (Benner, 2013, 317). Although political realists rarely give a clear definition of the common good, political agents should aspire to act in ways that are beneficial for the common good, and they have good self-interested reasons to do so.

To put this discussion in slightly more modern terms and in a way that most contemporary political realists could accept, Machiavelli was in favour of establishing a state where its citizens enjoyed republican freedom but understood that this required a degree of ruthlessness and willingness to do what is conventionally regarded as immoral. Republican freedom we can define as a form of non-domination. Political realists today set up ‘sheer domination’ as conceptually distinct from legitimate authority. Regardless of what end the political realists want to pursue, they should take “more seriously the normative value of politics in offering secure and popularly legitimised rule as an end in its own right” (Bellamy, 2018, 168). Political agents should recognise that their use of power when ruling (and the ends that they use their power) should be “‘acceptable’ to the ruled through being nondominating of any given group” (Bellamy, 2018, 172). I am

³⁸ Contemporary political scientists confirm this observation by Machiavelli. In democracies, a political leader’s ‘selectorate’ (the people who select the leader) is too large for them to buy off. “So more democratic types of governments, dependent as they are on large coalitions, tend to emphasise spending to create effective public policies that improve general welfare” (De Mesquita, 2011). This is not the case for dictators who rely on a smaller essential coalition to win and maintain power. As intimated by Machiavelli, “it is more efficient for them to govern by spending a chunk of revenue to buy the loyalty of their coalition through private benefits, even though these benefits come at the expense of the larger taxpaying public ... small coalitions encourage stable, corrupt, private-goods oriented regimes. The choice between enhancing social welfare or enriching a privileged few is not a question of how benevolent a leader is. Honourable motives might seem important, but they are overwhelmed by the need to keep supporters happy, and the means of keeping them happy depends on how many need rewarding” (De Mesquita, 2011)

not suggesting that political realists are or should be republicans, if republicans believe “first, that the freedom of a person requires the absence of subjection to another’s will, even the will of someone indulgent and well-disposed; and, second, that a polity that is required to support the freedom of all citizens – historically, a non-inclusive category – should be organized around a mixed constitution that gives citizens a contestatory as well as an electoral role” (Pettit, 2017, 331). However, Pettit does show how the tradition of (what he refers to as) civic republicanism easily meets the desiderata of political realism, such as its anti-moralism, anti-deontologism, and anti-utopianism (Pettit, 2017).

Weber also does not provide a strong account of what ends a political agent should strive for. Weber is a value pluralist and believes that “there appears to be no ultimate standpoint, no position of natural right, for example, from which to decide what cause to serve” (Mittleman, 2014, 287). There are however important limits that he places on the ends that political agents can pursue. Ideally, political leaders will have three qualities to do justice to the power they have, passion, a sense of responsibility, and proportionality. I have discussed the latter two qualities above, so I will focus on passion, which is the most relevant quality for my discussion on what ends political agents should strive towards. Passion “connotes a deep source of energy and commitment, rather than a superficial craving for experience or excitement” (Mittleman, 2014, 286). It is this passion or depth of conviction that gives the politician the strength to continue fighting in politics and what distinguishes between people who ‘live for’ politics and people who ‘live off’ politics (for example, merely using politics as a source of income). It also is important for the politician to take a stand based on this passion, rather than simply executing the orders received from a superior (Philp, 2007). This passion is a disciplined and detached devotion to a cause. It is disciplined from “the sin of vanity, of pursuing power for ‘personal self-intoxication, instead of exclusively entering the service of ‘the cause’ is one of the primal sins of politics” (Mittleman, 2014, 286). We can exclude ‘vanity’ or the pursuit of power for the sake of power as an end that political agents can have. Another end that Weber categorically rejects is personal salvation. As Weber argues “He who seeks the salvation of the soul, of his own and of others, should not seek it along the avenue of politics, for the quite different tasks of politics can only be solved by violence. The genius or demon of

politics lives in an inner tension with the god of love, as well as with the Christian God as expressed by the church” (Weber, 2004, 80).

3. 5 - Two Examples of Theorising about Politics with an Ethic of Responsibility

It is difficult to talk in abstract terms about something that is very contextual. For this reason, it is worth going through several examples of how political realists have analysed political situations and the actions of political agents. The first comes from Raymond Geuss and his analysis of Tony Blair’s actions in the Iraq War. Geuss repeatedly uses Tony Blair’s actions and deliberations in the Iraq War as an example of what is so problematic about moralism in politics. Sleat goes so far as to refer to Blair as Geuss’s ‘bete noire’ (Sleat, 2018, 17). The second is from Karuna Mantena and her analysis of the politics of Gandhian Non-violence as a form of good political strategy.

We can start with Geuss’s analysis of Blair and what he finds to be problematic about moralism in politics. It is worth quoting him in full because some elements of his analysis are quite problematic.

In the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, a group of experts on the Middle East met with Tony Blair to warn him of the possible untoward consequences of a decision to invade. The situation in Iraq, they claimed, was complex, and it would be easy to upset the delicate balance that existed between the various political, religious, and national groups; one would have to have a very clear idea of what one planned to do, how one would organize the occupation and reconstruction of the country, and so on. Blair is said to have listened with evident lack of interest and increasing annoyance, and to have repeatedly interrupted the experts with the rhetorical question, “But Saddam is evil, isn’t he?” In his own later formulation, his political credo was “All I know is what I believe,” where “believe” is not so much an epistemological, as a religiously based moral category, the equivalent of George W. Bush’s “gut feelings.” Some philosophers call these “moral intuitions”; they are construed as strong, relatively unreflective, individual moral reactions that individuals have to specific situations.

“Moralism” in politics is the view that the distinction between good and evil is clear and easy to discern to all men of good will, that is, to all those who are not themselves morally corrupt, and because this is the case, it is inadvisable to try to get too detailed an understanding of any given situation. Merely accumulating factual knowledge, one might argue, is not in itself making a moral, much less a political, judgment. Starting from this claim one might go on to assert that too much knowledge could actually be politically dangerous in that it could divert attention from the really important task of taking a clear moral stand. Excessive knowledge of the details, except in so far as it concerns the implementation of a decision already made, might tend to obscure the bright line between the side of the angels and the forces of evil, or to undermine one’s resolve. The genuinely admirable moral agent sees the salient moral features of a situation quickly and immediately, faces up to the situation resolutely, and acts decisively to implement his “intuitions.” (Geuss, 2009, 111)

This analysis is problematic in at least two ways. The first is that there are elements that are quite trivial; trivial in the sense that any reasonable person would agree, not in the sense that it is not worth arguing for. The second is that Geuss’s criticism does not apply to any reasonable political theorist. I am not sure if any contemporary political philosopher is a moralist about politics if that is the definition of moralism. We can start with the part that I believe any sensible person would endorse. There are many unsavoury regimes that exist in the world. Human rights abuses occur daily in many areas in the world, including in developed nations. However, this does not mean that reasonable agents should intervene militarily without understanding the complexities of the situation, the difficulty and unpredictability of military action, and the potential backlash of military action from the population being helped. We can tell from Geuss’s analysis that Blair acted poorly from the perspective of an ethic of responsibility. Blair was too focused on the idea that Saddam Hussein was evil, which was the main justification for intervention. The fact that overthrowing Saddam Hussein had many predictable negative consequences was ignored because Blair believed that ultimately the right thing to do was to remove an evil dictator. As Sleat argues “despite the plethora of considerations for and against the invasion, the incredible complexities of the situation, and the deep uncertainties regarding the consequences of an attack, Blair’s decision making seemed determined by his conviction that Saddam Hussein was evil”

(Sleat, 2018, 17). This example shows that realism means that “one does not think about politics merely in terms of moral categories like “evil” or vague aspirational concepts like “freedom,” but that one starts, as Max Weber taught us, from action and its consequences.

The controversial element of his analysis is his understanding of what is meant by moralism. While political realists have used the term in many ways (and applied it to many people), they have also consistently used it to label contemporary political philosophers. If the definition of someone who is a moralist is someone who argues that ‘excessive knowledge of the details’ is problematic and that a ‘genuinely admirable moral agent’ is someone who acts resolutely based on their initial gut feelings regardless of the facts of the case, I do not believe any moral or political philosopher is a moralist. Both political realists and non-political realists can and should argue against moralism. Most moral and political philosophers would argue that there is nothing morally admirable about an agent acting on their gut feelings of good and evil with no consideration of the details of their context.

My second example of theorising about politics with an ethic of responsibility is interesting because it shows that political realism does not always have to mean ‘lowering the bar’ in terms of what we can demand from politics and political agents. Actions that most people consider to be paradigmatic examples of idealism can be considered acting in ways that are politically effective and responsible. Mantena plausibly argues that many forms of realism “are perhaps especially susceptible to the charge of conservatism, given their traditional emphasis on questions of political stability, order, and moderation over and against, for example, justice and revolution ... the turn to anti-ideal, bottom-up, or immanent theorising is seen to tether political possibilities too closely to the given coordinates of political life and thereby tends toward a naturally conservative, even pessimistic, outlook” (Mantena, 2012, 456). Mantena’s analysis shows that one can engage in theorising about politics with ethic of responsibility without necessarily going down this path.

To argue that Gandhi was a political realist is surprising for most people. Gandhi and his strategy of nonviolence is “often taken as exemplar of pure conviction politics ... there is a tendency to characterise Gandhi as a moral idealist or absolutist, as someone who rejected utilitarian/Machiavellian political thinking in which ends justify means

and, instead, evoked strict ethical limits to legitimate political action.” (Mantena, 2012, 456). By analysing Gandhi’s writings, Mantena shows how he had a clearly developed theory of politics, which led him to believe that a strategy of nonviolence was not only morally desirable, but politically potent as well. Gandhi not only recognised the differentials of power between the independence movements and the British, he also recognised that violence being an “absolute, irreversible deed” can initiate “definite dynamics of resentment, retrenchment, and retaliation or what is often prosaically referred to as the *cycle of violence*” (Mantena, 2012, 460). Violence contributes to this cycle “even when committed for the sake of justice or a final peace” (Mantena, 2012, 460). Gandhi was aware of the diverse “moral-psychological elements that drive [political agents] beyond mere conflicts of interest”, which are what endow politics with an “inherent tendency towards escalation in conflict” (Mantena, 2012, 461). He responded to his detractors by claiming that nonviolence was “a militant and not passive form of resistance” and ensured that the actions of the independence movement were “tied to specific demands ... that could be reasonably negotiated or met by opponents ... Acts of disobedience and resistance, in addition to being disciplined and defined, thus were meant to work less through humiliating or triumphing over an enemy but by producing conditions for progressive and iterative resolutions.” (Mantena, 2012, 467). To go through all Mantena’s analysis would take too much space. However, she shows that to have a realist theory of politics is to hold a “contextual, consequentialist, and moral-psychological analysis of a political world understood to be marked by inherent tendencies toward conflict, domination, and violence” and to use this understanding to make the world a more just place whilst avoiding a worst-case scenario of constantly escalating political violence (Mantena, 2012, 457).

3. 6 - Conclusion

Political realists have tried to show their distinctiveness in the methodological disputes by emphasising the idea of a distinctively political normativity. I believe this is not the best way to emphasise what political realists want and how they see the relationship between political theory and political practice. There are other ways of showing how important it is to engage in normative theorising that is more appropriate for guiding real world political agents in difficult circumstances. I believe this chapter has shown,

at least partially, how this can be done. I believe the best version of political realism is one that tries to theorise about politics with an ethic of responsibility. This version allows political realists to express what they really want from normative theories without relying on some of the more controversial claims that we discussed in the previous chapter.

There are at least three different tasks involved in theorising about politics responsibly, and the most important terms associated with all of them is 'contextualism' and 'power'. The first is modelling the political situation. Theorising about politics with an ethic of responsibility requires an accurate depiction of the political situation. If a theorist of politics wants to provide good guidance to a political agent about how they should proceed in the face of radical disagreement, they are unlikely to be successful with a bad model of the political situation. Modelling requires an in-depth knowledge of the specific circumstances that real political agents are facing. This includes what specific disagreements real political agents have. It also requires an accurate account of what instruments real political agents have to develop coalitions of power in order to manage this disagreement.

The second task when theorising about politics is guiding real-world political agents. This requires a good account of what options are available for political agents and an account of what consequences are most likely when these options are chosen. Theorists of politics need to be aware that there is a limit to what any individual political agent can do, and that when engaging in large-scale collective endeavours, at best, political agents can choose a strategy, rather than an outcome. Guiding political agents needs a keen awareness of power, who has it, how much that political agent has, and what limitations they face. They need to attain the right balance among a wide range of demands that at times seem incompatible, and a good guide of political agents will help political agents in this difficult process.

Finally, the last task discussed in this chapter is a realistic analysis of institutions. Much moralistic political philosophy today considers justice to be the first virtue of institutions. Political realists believe that institutional analysis should be much more realistic. It has to be much more historically contextual and recognise that government as an institution has been one of the main instigators of human suffering. Institutions

should always be designed in a way that curtails the worst elements of human behaviour before trying to aspire for anything grander such as justice or individual flourishing.

I ended this discussion with a brief account of what ends political agents should pursue. It is difficult to know what political realists believe on this topic because they rarely discuss it. However, I tried to show with historical sources that political agents should live 'for' politics, which requires a passion along with a sense of proportion and responsibility. Political agents should act for the maintenance of their political community in a way that is legitimate, at least among the citizens of the political community. I concluded with two examples of theorising about politics with an ethic of responsibility.

This chapter was meant to develop the political realist position and how they should answer the question 'how should we engage in normative theorising about politics?'. There were a few references to how political realists criticise how moralists engage in normative theorising. However, there has not been a lot of discussion of how theorists who hold this version of political realism would critique work done in contemporary political theory. The main goal of the next chapter will be to develop this critique.

Chapter 4 – A Case Study Approach for the Political Realist Critique

The previous chapter provided what I believe to be the best account of political realism. When political realists engage in political theorising, what they should be advocating is theorising about politics with an ethic of responsibility. While I made some gestures to what this means for the political realist critique of moralistic political philosophy, I did not develop the critique as much as I developed the position. This chapter aims to develop the political realist critique in light of this new version of political realism.

One of the main problems in the methodological disputes of political theory is the lack of clarity. At times, this is the fault of authors who do not develop their positions clearly. However, even the most analytically precise political philosophers will have a hard time engaging in the disputes in a clear way. I believe one of the main reasons for this is the generalisation that almost everyone (ideal and non-ideal theorists included), engages in. It is difficult to be precise when someone makes a claim ‘political theorists do x’. The generalisation will either be trivially true (which means it is not useful) or it will not be representative of many people who engage in normative political theory. Defending a position in the methodological disputes of political theory can be very difficult for this reason. When someone argues that political theory is problematic because political theorists do ‘x’, there will inevitably be many moral and political philosophers who will interject and claim that they do not do that. This can undermine the strength or at least the applicability of the critique, which can distract from what people who are offering the critique really want to argue.

I want to develop the political realist critique in a way that avoids this problem. The best way to do that is to look at specific examples of political philosophy to see how the political realist critique can be applied to them. In this chapter, I choose three, namely *The Ethics of Immigration* by Joseph Carens, *How Not to be a Hypocrite: School Choice for the Morally Perplexed* by Adam Swift and, *Is Democracy Possible Here?* by Ronald Dworkin. These were chosen because they can be considered more ‘political’ examples of political philosophy. What it means for these texts to be ‘more political’ examples of political philosophy will be discussed later in the chapter. For now, it is enough to say they are more political because they focus on specific politically salient issues. I start by discussing each text and the critique that political realists can make of it. I then discuss some of the similarities and differences between the texts, to ensure we can pinpoint

the nuances of each and how they impact the critiques that political realists can make of them. Finally, I discuss how a political realist would approach these politically salient issues. It is important to note that I am both sympathetic to and critical of the claims that political realists would make against these texts. I am sympathetic in the sense that I believe the claims I describe below apply to the texts of moralist political philosophy I use as case studies. However, I am critical in the sense that I do not believe that the claims made by political realists against these texts are devastating. They were asking different questions. As I will try to show more clearly next chapter, we should not reject political philosophy merely because it is useless in guiding real-world political agents in contexts of radical disagreement.

4. 1 – *The Ethics of Immigration*, Joseph Carens

This book has many features that might appeal to the political realist.³⁹ Firstly, Carens states that his book is an example of “political theory from the ground up” (Carens, 2016, 9). There might be several features of a ‘ground up’ political theory. The first is to avoid starting from an overarching theory of justice or democracy and then applying those theories to an issue like immigration. Instead, Carens starts with specific questions that are pertinent to the topic that is being discussed. He states that his questions in the book are “under what conditions should immigrants be able to become citizens? What legal rights should residents have? What can a receiving state legitimately ask (or demand) of immigrants with respect to cultural adaptation?” (Carens, 2016, 9). The second feature is a sensitivity to real-world conditions and empirical data. Carens claims that he will “presuppose (1) the contemporary international order which divides the world into independent states with vast differences of freedom, security, and economic opportunity among them” (Carens, 2016, 10). The second half of the book discusses what Carens believes ought to be the case in an ideal world, namely open borders. However, in the first half of the book, Carens starts with a much more realistic model of the geopolitical situation today. In fact, a lot of the first few chapters provide a very detailed account of how immigration controls work in certain countries, including accounts of birth right citizenship, naturalisation, permanent residency, and temporary

³⁹ I am sure that many of these features might also appeal to political moralists. However, I will focus my discussion on how each of these texts have features that might appeal to the political realist.

worker programmes. Finally, Carens starts with what we might call deep-seated assumptions about the normative right that states have to control borders. Carens starts with “the conventional moral view on immigration, i.e., that despite vast differences between states, each state is morally entitled to exercise considerable discretionary control over the admission of immigrants” (Carens, 2016, 10). He recognises that even though he believes that states do not have this moral entitlement, this is too ‘unrealistic’. Most people have very strong views about the right of states to control their borders, especially in today’s political environment. Even if it is true that open borders are the correct/most justifiable moral view on immigration, it is a long way away from real world political discourse. Carens claims that his approach is “pragmatic”, because “the conventional moral view is deeply entrenched. So, if I am to have any hope of persuading people of the merits of my views on the other issues that I discuss, such as access to citizenship, the rights of temporary workers, and so on, I must not tie those arguments to the case for open borders. Adopting the conventional view as a presupposition permits me to explore the nature and extent of the limits justice imposes on immigration policies within a more ‘realistic’ framework” (Carens, 2016, 10-11). By not starting with constructing an overarching theory of justice, by being ‘realistic’ about real-world conditions and starting from deeply held moral views today, a ‘ground up’ political theory tries to generate “an overlapping consensus among different political theorists and among ordinary people from different democratic societies about the moral principles that I appeal to my arguments” (Carens, 2016, 9).

While these might be general features of a political theory from the ground up, Carens takes it a step further. To start completely from the ground up would be difficult in a normative and theoretical sense. Without some reference to a theory of justice that discusses what people and nation-states are entitled to, a completely contextual normative political theory might make trade-offs that seem ad hoc or morally unjustifiable. Carens does appeal to a broader set of principles, but he tries to limit his appeal to uncontroversial principles. He refers to these uncontroversial principles as ‘democratic principles’. Democratic principles “in a very general sense ...refer to the broad moral commitments that underlie and justify contemporary political institutions and policies throughout North American and Europe – things like the ideas that all human beings are of equal moral worth, that disagreements should normally be resolved through the principle of majority rule, that we have a duty to respect the rights and

freedoms of individuals, that legitimate government depends upon the consent of the governed, that all citizens should be equal under the law, that people should not be subject to discrimination on the basis of characteristics like race, religion, or gender, that we should respect norms of fairness and reciprocity in our policies, and so on” (Carens, 2016, 2). We might consider this to be a more literal (or ‘ground up’) interpretation of Rawls’s appeal to the public political culture of a liberal democratic society as the source for the fundamental ideas that can serve as a point of convergence for all reasonable citizens of a liberal society.⁴⁰ The second paragraph of the United States Declaration of Independence states “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” (US, 1776). Carens uses these ‘democratic principles’, which are not only enshrined in multiple constitutions but also appealed to in democratic discourse today, to make his normative claims about immigration. For example, Carens argues in the third chapter of this book that “democratic principles severely limit the conditions which a democratic state may impose as prerequisites for citizenship” (Carens, 2016, 45).

Political realists should be sympathetic to many of the features of a ‘ground up’ political theory. Does that mean that the political realist critique does not apply to Carens’s work on immigration? I think there are still some grievances that a political realist can raise against this case of ground up political theory. The main worry is that, even though Carens is engaging with a political issue, he is still theorising about politics with an ethic of principle. A political realist is not satisfied with the mere engagement with a politically salient issue (although I presume they would prefer more people to engage with politically salient issues). They want political philosophers to theorise responsibly about political issues. Taking certain facts for granted, such as current social and institutional arrangements, is not enough for the ethic of responsibility that political realists advocate. Taking deeply held views for granted, such as the right of countries to control their borders, might be the first step for someone theorising responsibly, but it is not enough.

⁴⁰ Rawls states that society’s public political culture “comprises the political institutions of a constitutional regime and the public traditions of their interpretation (including those of the judiciary), as well as historic texts and documents that are common knowledge” (*PL*, 13-14).

We can see this principled approach to politics throughout Caren's work. At times, Carens engages with a highly moralised version of the debate on immigration policy. Some of the challenges that Carens considers show that he is not engaging with the disagreement we see in the real world. Instead, the disagreement that Carens engages with is focused on a very ideal goal for today's politics. For example, one of the chapters discusses the idea of a democratic ethos. He claims that "democracies work well only if most of the citizens accept democratic values and principles and if they reflect these commitments in their attitudes and dispositions. In short, democracies require a democratic ethos" (Carens, 2016, 64). In the same page, he claims that the challenge he is dealing with in the chapter "is to say something about the sort of democratic ethos that is needed in a political community if citizens of immigrant origins are to be fully included" (Carens, 2016, 64). To me, this sounds like a very ideal challenge relative to the 'real' discourse on immigration.⁴¹ If this is true, Carens might be engaging in normative theorising about a politically salient issue, but in a way that most people in the real world of politics will ignore because it is not helpful in the process of managing the disagreement we see today. Of course, this ideal challenge is going to have implications for how we engage with the disagreement we see in actual politics today. Someone who is not a racist or a xenophobe might still object to a more inclusive immigration policy by appealing to the concept of a healthy democracy. They might claim that immigrants, due to their inability to understand the language or the culture of the domestic society, will undermine the functioning of a healthy democracy. However, the successful attainment of a democratic ethos is a very ideal goal for today's politics, even without a discussion of immigration policy.

Carens might respond by claiming that it is not the job of the philosopher to argue against racist or xenophobic views. He might claim that these views are based on irrational and unreasonable impulses. The reasoned and principled arguments of a moral and political philosopher should be reserved for rational arguments. This is not to say that Carens believes that these views do not exist. However, he might claim that there are rational and reasonable reasons provided by those who currently object to inclusive immigration regimes. The philosopher's job is to provide the most charitable and

⁴¹ A lot of the discourse on immigration in today's politics focuses on the economic benefits/burdens of immigration policy, the impact that immigrants have on the 'native culture' and can be racist and xenophobic.

plausible versions of these arguments and reject them through reason. If the strongest philosophical versions of anti-immigration advocacy are refuted, it will be a lot easier to morally reject anti-immigration advocacy that comes from unreasonable sources such as racism and xenophobia.

I agree with this response. However, the political realist would claim that it is a response only available to the philosopher.⁴² It is not a response that a political agent can rely on. It assumes that xenophobic individuals might accept that their impulses should be irrelevant to their choice about how to vote. It assumes that they are listening to the reasoning of a moral and political philosopher, which is a stretch in today's politically polarised world. What can a political agent do with the philosopher's reasons if political opponents refuse to engage with them through processes of reasoning? A philosopher can easily reject those perspectives as 'unreasonable' and exclude them from moral consideration. If you are not even willing to be part of a conversation, why should your views be included in the justificatory community of immigration principles and policy? However, a political agent does not have this luxury. They can try to 1. Convince them, 2. Defeat them through larger coalitions of support, or 3. Negotiate with them, no matter how 'unreasonable' they may be from a moral stand point.⁴³ Even in this 'pragmatic' and contextual theory on immigration, the debate that Carens engages with is too far from the actual political discourse on immigration. This is problematic because immigration is one of the most significant issues of today's politics in Western political societies.

Another way that Carens's work is like the canonical moralist texts in political philosophy is how it discusses power. Discussing power is fundamental for any discussion of politics. When Rawls discusses political power, his discussion is focused

⁴² They would also cite Williams's frustration with the Manichean dualism of political theory and political science. Carens's hypothetical response maintains the dualism that Williams wanted to address with his broader conception of politics.

⁴³ Of course, there are many other options that are available for a political agent. They might believe that a lot of anti-immigration sentiment is being generated by a hostile media. Therefore, they might aim their sights on either silencing these hostile media outlets or directly rejecting the claims that emerge from them. They might try to engage with the legitimate grievances that those with anti-immigration views have and redirect that anger from immigrants towards other entities, such as tax avoiding multi-national corporations. By 'convince them' I don't mean that political agents can only convince people with anti-immigration views by telling them about the benefits of immigration. I think the three options 'convince them', 'defeat them', and 'negotiate with them' are broad categories that include these more specific options.

primarily on the morally permissible uses of that power.⁴⁴ This can be problematic for political agents as it gives them no guidance about how to gain that power in the first place. Political realists also believe that to maintain power in the face of deep disagreement we see in politics, political agents with power sometimes need to act in ways that violate certain moral constraints. The same problems that political realists find about Rawls's discussion of political power can also be applied to Carens's analysis of political power and its relationship with immigration control. At one point Carens claims "even if we accept the widely accepted premise that states have a right to control immigration, there are still significant moral constraints on how that control may be exercised" (Carens, 2016, 191).

Finally, there are moments where Carens' analysis of immigration simply appeals to the better angels of our nature. There are moments where he claims that doing the morally correct thing can also be the best thing to do for our own self-interest (particularly our enlightened self-interest). He recognises that "as a general matter, it is much easier to get people to follow a course of action recommended on moral grounds when it fits with self-interest ... than when it does not. Finding ways to present moral arguments that draw attention to the links between morality and interest make it more likely that the moral arguments will be accepted. This approach is common in politics, and it can do a lot of good in guiding policies in ways that make them more ethical" (Carens, 2016, 222). While this all shows a keen awareness of what might be politically useful, the section discussing morality and self-interest is very short. It is also mostly used to reject the relationship when it comes to certain issues in immigration policy, such as refugee policy. As Carens rightly claims "any morality worth the name will contain views of right and wrong, or good and bad that *may* clash with self-interest, even enlightened self-interest, under some circumstances" (Carens, 2016, 223). I do not think a political realist would necessarily disagree with the last claim.⁴⁵ However, this appeal to morality can (and does) have significant political ramifications.

⁴⁴ To quote Rawls's Liberal Principle of Legitimacy, "our exercise of political power is fully proper only when it is exercised in accordance with a constitution the essentials of which all citizens as free and equal may reasonably be expected to endorse in the light of principles and ideals acceptable to their common human reason" (*PL*, 137)

⁴⁵ There might be a few Hobbesian contractarians who would disagree with a broad interpretation of this claim. However, I am not aware of any Hobbesian contractarians who are also political realists in the methodological debates in contemporary political theory.

The best example of this can be seen in recent immigration policy in Germany. In 2015, Angela Merkel decided to welcome hundreds of thousands of refugees into Germany. According to most plausible and attractive accounts of morality, she was acting in a way that was morally obligatory. Some who believe that the demands of morality require you to only do your fair share would claim that Merkel did something supererogatory, which makes her decision even more admirable for those who are concerned with the plight of refugees. However, acting in this morally desirable way has had significant political costs. Deep divisions within Merkel's Christian Democratic Union Part (CDU) have developed over the open-door policy for refugees. The policy has given the far-right parties in Germany 'new life', which was shown in the most recent federal election results in Germany. The CDU is still the biggest party, but it lost a significant share of its vote relative to previous elections. The vote share for the far-right 'Alternative für Deutschland' party (AfD) surged to 13%, which made it the third largest party in the Bundestag. This is the first time an openly nationalist party has entered the Bundestag in almost six decades (Oltermann, 2017). Recent reports suggest that the original open-door policy has been capped due to the political necessities of creating a new coalition government. This was the result of negotiation not with an opposing party but with the CDU's sister party, the Christian Social Union, which suggests that there could be even more restrictions in the future. Doing the right thing from a moral perspective can have significant political consequences. This means at least two things. Firstly, few political agents are going to be willing to do what the moral philosopher asks. Secondly, those who do might find themselves out of power. Or worse, they may let those with deplorable intentions into power, who will not just reverse those policies, but implement even more draconian ones. Political realists want to say that political agents acting in these ways are acting irresponsibly, even if their conscience was dictated by moral principles.

It is important to reiterate that all political agents, to have any effect on society, need to generate meaningful coalitions, manage disagreement, and use power responsibly. The amount of access to the levers of power might be different for me as a regular citizen versus a President or Prime Minister. However, this is an issue of scope. As a regular citizen, I can afford to think less about using power responsibly and be more of an activist. However, I cannot be blind about the possible consequences of my advocacy. If I want to have more of an impact, I need to engage with people who disagree with

my cause, and I need to generate meaningful groups of people who also support my cause. The main point is, all political agents need to be concerned with the same type of concerns, regardless of how much access to the levers of power they directly have.

To summarise, there are several complaints that a political realist could raise against Carens's *The Ethics of Immigration*. Firstly, Carens is engaging with a debate that is highly moralised and not representative of the debate that occurs in politics today about immigration. Because of this, it serves as a poor guide for a political agent who needs to engage with and manage both reasonable and unreasonable people and their disagreements about immigration policy. Secondly, Carens's discussion focuses on the moral constraints on permissible uses of political power. This gives very little advice on how a political agent might gain political power in the face of deep disagreement in the first place. It also provides little guidance for political agents to use power responsibly. There are many unintended consequences in any collective endeavour, which any responsible political agent needs to be wary of. A political agent who wants to make the world a better place also needs to ensure that they maintain their position of power against people who would use that power to make the world a worse place. Doing the morally obligatory thing can have significant negative political consequences. Carens's focus on the moral constraints on how to use political power provides little guidance for a political agent who wants to use their power responsibly.

4. 2 – *How Not to be a Hypocrite: School Choice for the Morally Perplexed Parent*, Adam Swift

Swift's book is particularly interesting for the political realist as it places a significant emphasis on agency. The other books I discuss in this chapter might be more 'non-ideal' or 'empirical', but they are still discussing normative issues from a structural perspective. In other words, they tend to focus on questions such as 'what laws should be in place for the control of immigration?' and 'what rights do societies have to control their borders?' For the political realist, this is still too far from the political agent's perspective. Even the most powerful political agents have significant limits on what they can do. They are dependent upon certain coalitions for support. They are also

constrained by many factors that are out of their control.⁴⁶ Swift's book is "for parents who have a choice about what kind of school their children go to and find that the choice raises moral dilemmas" (Swift, 2003, ix). It is not only a case of what should political society do under non-ideal circumstances. It is also geared towards specific agents in these circumstances.

Like Carens, Swift's book can be considered as an example of political theory 'from the ground up'. Swift does not start with a theory of justice and apply that theory to a practical issue like school choice. He also discusses the politically salient issue of school choice from deeply held convictions, even if they are not fully justifiable from a moral perspective. Unlike Carens, Swift does not start theorising about school choice from a 'pragmatic' perspective straight away. The first chapter provides a discussion of one of the fundamental normative questions that need to be discussed in any treatise on school choice, namely the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate partiality towards our children. These are fundamental questions with cases designed to pump intuitions towards morally justified limits to partiality.

It is around the second part of the book where Swift starts to engage directly with more worldly matters. In this process, there are some qualities that a political realist would admire. The first is a discussion of potential value conflicts. Swift discusses some conflicts that real people might have when it comes to school choice and advocating change in education. Secondly, he discusses the idea of limited resources and the difficulty of implementing reforms. Third, Swift spends an entire chapter discussing the idea of effectiveness and the limited impact of an individual agent on social change. A lot of individual political agents might agree that private schools should be banned and that they should not send their children to selective schools. However, they might also think that they themselves have limited power to make any change. Sending their child to the local state school might have no impact whatsoever on making the world a more just place but might have a significant cost on the lives of their children. Because of this, individual political agents might feel helpless and use that helplessness as a justification

⁴⁶ Historical accidents might be considered 'morally arbitrary' for the purposes of moral deliberation. However, the path that led to the current situation is something that even powerful political agents cannot completely ignore.

for not abiding by their moral duties. Swift dedicates a chapter to discuss this issue in depth.

Political realists will also be sympathetic to Swift's direct engagement with actual rhetoric used in real political debates today. Swift directly engages with a lot of the reasons and justifications that might (and have) been used by real people in the real world. For example, one justification that Swift rejects is "it's wrong for a parent to sacrifice her children to her career", which is a direct reference to the real-life example of Harriet Harman, a member of parliament who sent her children to a selective school (Swift, 2003, 109). It seems unlikely that the justification "I have a legal right to opt out" would be given by a moral philosopher in a moral philosophy seminar (Swift, 2003, 97). Instead of ignoring these claims, Swift responds to them directly. All of this gives a 'ground up' feel to Swift's enterprise. Real political agents who read Swift's book are better equipped to deal with arguments that are actually made in political discourse.

Like Carens, Swift takes a pragmatic approach to certain ideals and principles. As he states in the conclusion, "my first-best political solution is to ban [private schools]" (Swift, 2003, 168). However, he rarely discusses how he would go about banning private schools. He claims, "that's not an option ... there is no political will for that proposal" (Swift, 2003, 168). He does not start with the ideal and state that private schools should be banned and any parent who sends their kids to private schools should be ashamed of their decision. The book is very much tailored to 'realistic' options that parents might face in today's non-ideal society.

All of this should sound good to a political realist. In what ways might a political realist criticise this text for failing to theorise about politics responsibly? The first issue is that the text is mostly focused on the moral permissibility of opting out of state schools in non-ideal circumstances. It spends little time talking about how someone (a parent or a non-parent) might take political steps to change the education system in desirable ways. The book is aimed at individual agents but only qua parents, not qua political agents and citizens. Swift does list some action-guiding duties to make the decision to send a child to private school justifiable. However, it ultimately is a work of moral philosophy about the justifiability of certain decisions.

Swift does discuss certain concrete policies in his book that (if implemented) would go far to rectifying the imbalances between state and private school quality. For example, he advocates making the charitable status of independent schools conditional on certain socially desirable outcomes. These policies are clearly much more feasible compared to the banning of all private schools. However, there is a reason why even these very reasonable policies have not been implemented. In some cases, reasonable policies have not been implemented because of the lack of democratic will. However, making the charitable status conditional is not one of these cases. A supermajority of people in the UK supports either the conditional nature of this tax-exempt status or the removal of the status (Dahlgreen, 2014). However, neither of these options have happened. This is most likely explained by politics and the nature of political struggle. To put it bluntly, a lot of powerful people have an interest in maintaining the status quo. Swift's text says little about how we can engage with these powerful entities. The arguments might be convincing, but when it comes to defeating them or negotiating with certain interests, there is little political guidance.

The scope of the book also emphasises an issue with moralistic texts. Swift's book is called *How Not to be a Hypocrite*. The main audience of the text is very specific. The book is meant for "parents aware of the moral issues raised by school choice ... Where others worry about which school will be best for their children, they agonise about whether they are justified in seeking the best. They think there is something wrong with an education system that permits children's chances in life to be influenced by their parents' ability and willingness to pay. They disapprove of an arrangement in which the most able and motivated children are creamed off, depriving the majority of the benefits of their ability and motivation. They believe in equality of opportunity, and recognise that it restricts what parents should be allowed to do for their children. They worry about the fit between principle and practice" (Swift, 2003, ix-x). In other words, the audience consists of a group of left-leaning middle to upper-class individuals who find certain elements of their behaviour problematic. This is a small group of people we can refer to as the 'egalitarian base'. These are people who mostly accept broadly egalitarian principles and need a bit of help from philosophers to achieve an equilibrium among their considered judgments, their principles, and their behaviour. For most egalitarian political agents, only having to engage with this egalitarian base would be a luxury. When political realists talk about managing radical disagreement, it includes a much wider

constituency. Some people might reject equality of opportunity or adopt a much thinner conception of it. Some might have no problem being hypocritical about their behaviour as long as their self-interest has been satisfied, or their 'side' has won in the political arena. Except for the responses to rhetoric provided by Swift, there is not much more political advice that can be drawn for the agent who must manage this radical disagreement. The problem seems to be that even though Swift is engaging in 'ground up' political theory, there is a sense in which he is ultimately 'preaching to the choir'.

To summarise, Swift's book does a better job at theorising about politics responsibly (relative to Carens's work) as he directly engages with a lot of claims made in political discourse today, and the prescriptions are focused on individual agents. However, it ultimately is focused on the issue of when is it morally justifiable for parents to send their children to independent schools, which means it is focused on the morality of school choice. There is little in the book that can directly guide political agents who want to change the education system in a more progressive fashion. This lack of guidance for political agents is made worse by the fact that the book is 'preaching to the choir'. To generate meaningful change, political agents need to engage with a much more diverse audience. They need to be able to convince people who do not accept the same assumptions, or to negotiate/defeat them in some way. The fact that the main audience of the book is limited to those who already accept broadly egalitarian principles and are motivated not to be hypocrites, the book does little to help political agents who need to engage with an audience much larger and much less sympathetic than the 'egalitarian base' that Swift engages with.

4. 3 – *Is Democracy Possible Here?* Ronald Dworkin

Dworkin is usually singled out as a paradigm case of a 'moralist'. He is regarded as a canonical figure in the 'high liberalism' of contemporary political theory (Galston, 2010). Furthermore, political realists (and those who advocate a more 'political' political philosophy) tend to use his luck egalitarianism as an example of the vice of moralism (Galston, 2010). I discuss this text to show how unfair these criticisms against Dworkin are, as his text on democracy, and his other 'political' text on abortion, are usually ignored by those who make these claims against Dworkin's work.

The text is not as ‘ground up’ as Carens’s and Swift’s work. It does not take certain social and institutional arrangements for granted. Dworkin also does not avoid certain prescriptions because there is insufficient political will to make them a realistic prospect. However, like Carens and Swift, he does focus on politically salient topics. Throughout the book, Dworkin engages with issues such as the War on Terror, human rights, taxation, and democracy. Throughout these chapters, Dworkin engages with concrete examples. When discussing the War on Terror, there are references to the activities of the Bush administration, Supreme Court cases that emerged in response to these activities, and even the reaction of the international community. Finally, when Dworkin engages with disagreement, he does not limit himself to engaging with disagreement amongst philosophers. He consistently refers to ‘red-blue lines’, which refers to conservative and liberal positions in contemporary American society. This suggests awareness and engagement with actual disagreement in real-world political discourse.

Even though the views that Dworkin ultimately advocates are very similar to the principles he endorses in his more ‘moralistic’ texts, he does not try to start with a fully developed account of his conception of justice. This is not an attempt to apply his theory of justice to practical issues. Instead, Dworkin tries to do something similar, but not identical, to the strategy used by Carens and Swift. His main strategy is to “find shared principles of sufficient substance to make a national debate possible and profitable ... that enough Americans on both sides of the supposedly unbridgeable divide would accept them if they took sufficient care to understand them” (Dworkin, 2008, 6-7). He refers to the first principle as “the principle of intrinsic value”, which “holds that each human life has a special kind of objective value” (Dworkin, 2008, 9). The second principle is “the principle of personal responsibility – it holds that each person has a special responsibility for realising the success of his own life, a responsibility that includes exercising his judgment about what kind of life would be successful for him” (Dworkin, 2008, 10). These principles are derived from his overarching moral and ethical theory. However, I do not think it is a complete accident that they resemble popular conservative slogans of the American right, such as the ‘sanctity of life’ (which we normally hear in disputes about abortion) and ‘personal

responsibility' (which we normally hear in disputes about economic and distributive justice).⁴⁷

Some of the criticisms that political realists might make against Carens and Swift's work can also apply here. For example, if Swift's book is applauded by political realists for its intricate analysis of agency, Dworkin's neglect of this would be problematic for the political realist. I will not repeat these claims. Instead, I think Dworkin's text is a perfect example of a common moralist strategy; a strategy that political realists might find problematic. We can refer to this common strategy as 'Abstraction for Common Ground'. Rawls argued that one of the roles of political philosophy is a "practical role arising from divisive political conflict when its task is to focus on deeply disputed questions and to see whether, despite appearances, some underlying basis of philosophical and moral agreement can be uncovered, or differences can at least be narrowed so that social cooperation on a footing of mutual respect among citizens can still be maintained" (Rawls, 2007, 10). Dworkin's aim is very similar. He states that he wants to discuss "principles that are sufficiently deep and general so that they can supply common ground for Americans from both political cultures into which we now seem divided" (Dworkin, 2008, 11).⁴⁸ The political realist might be sceptical that this is a useful way of dealing with disagreement. People will either be unconvinced (because not all our political convictions are the product of rational and moral deliberation) or will simply not listen. As Rossi and Sleat argue "We need politics in part precisely because of the ubiquity of moral disagreements about what we collectively should do" (Rossi and Sleat, 2014, 3). Another explanation of a set of moral principles will only add to the already ubiquitous moral disagreements that exist in today's politics.

⁴⁷ As Cohen argues, "Dworkin has, in effect, performed for egalitarianism the considerable service of incorporating within it the most powerful idea in the arsenal of the antiegalitarian Right: the idea of choice and responsibility" (Cohen, 2011, 32).

⁴⁸ Carens pursues this strategy as well. He states that one of the main aims of the book is "to take a step back from the political passions and practical policy concerns that usually animate these debates in order to reflect upon the deeper moral issues that they entail. I want to show that debates about immigration raise ethical questions, that many of these ethical questions are interconnected, and that a commitment to democratic principles greatly constrains the kinds of answers we can offer to these questions" (Carens, 2016, 2). He later claims that he wants to achieve an overlapping consensus not just amongst political philosophers but regular political agents as well through this type of abstract analysis.

4. 4 – The Political Realist Critique

The aim of this section is to compare and contrast these texts and how the political realist critique applies to them. In terms of how they are engaging in political philosophy, these texts are all focused on specific politically salient issues. They avoid starting with a construction of an overarching theory of justice, which is then applied to specific political issues. They are all sensitive to empirical data and the non-ideal circumstances of today's world.

There are however a few notable differences. I claimed that there were moments where Carens was engaging with a moralised version of the debate on immigration policy. Relative to Carens, Swift and Dworkin are consistently more sensitive to the actual disagreement in real-world political discourse. As I stated before, Swift directly engages with excuses provided by real people, even if they would not be raised in a moral philosophy seminar. Dworkin does something similar when he talks about disagreement along red-blue lines.

Swift was the only text in this trio that directly engaged with specific agents and their capabilities. Both Dworkin and Carens take a much more 'societal' approach to normative theorising. Of course, Swift also thinks about the issue of school choice from a societal perspective. However, his book is unique in the sense that its main audience is a specific set of agents with limited power. Presumably, all texts have an audience in mind, and I presume they are all ultimately addressing the current citizens of liberal democratic societies. But Swift is unique in addressing agents with limited power directly, which is an important aspect of thinking politically.

Relative to Dworkin, Carens and Swift take more things for granted throughout their texts. Both Carens and Swift avoided the 'first best' solution. In Carens's case, he spends little time talking about the case for open borders (relative to all his other work in the book about real-world immigration issues), even though this is the position he thinks is the most morally attractive. The same is the case for Swift and the abolition of private schools. The reason for this avoidance makes sense from a political standpoint. There is very little political will for these positions. From a democratic standpoint, many people might not listen to policies that they think are too far from the 'mainstream' of political possibility. There might be a lot of people who do not even realise that there is

anything wrong with these deep-seated conventions, merely because private schools have been around for so long that they are just taken for granted. Dworkin does talk about his 'first best' case, in the sense that he does genuinely believe in the principle of intrinsic value and the principle of personal responsibility; he seems to be interested in seeing how much we can normatively build on these two principles.

There is a slight difference between what Carens and Swift take for granted. Carens is more interested in taking certain institutional arrangements for granted. He is concerned with how our commitment to the public political culture of a liberal democratic society restricts the way our current institutional arrangements can treat people. Swift also takes certain institutional arrangements for granted. However, he also uses certain principles that he does not fully endorse. He starts off his book by stating his conception of equality of opportunity as "meritocratic: people with the same level of merit – IQ + effort – should have the same chances of success" (Swift, 2003, 24). Elizabeth Anderson criticises several of Swift's arguments because "they rely on a meritocratic conception of equality of opportunity that is inapplicable to K-12 education, where children's merits are yet to be determined" (Anderson, 2004, 101). In response, Swift states that he has written critically about the idea of meritocracy in other texts and is fully aware of why it should not be the ideal to regulate school policy (Swift, 204, 329). He also states that he only starts with the formulation of IQ + effort because "it is familiar to many as the definition of merit offered by Michael Young (1957) who first coined the term 'meritocracy', and the conception is soon broadened to the idea that 'those with similar levels of talent and motivation should have similar chances of success'" (Swift, 2004, 329). The point is, that he himself does not accept a meritocratic conception of equality of opportunity but is trying to appeal to "a sound intuition, likely to be accepted by my readers, about the unfairness of social background making a difference to children's prospects" (Swift, 2004, 329-330).

However, for the political realist, all three are ultimately theorising about politically salient issues in a principled manner. Carens (at times) avoids real debates we have about immigration and asks us to 'do the right thing' regarding our admission of refugees. A real political agent needs to engage with the real debate on immigration and can't rely on the argument that we should 'do the right thing'. Doing the 'right thing' and accepting more refugees might lead to consequences where the agent loses power or

gives up that power to those who would implement a far more draconian immigration policy. Dworkin tries to step back from political discourse until we can find abstract principles we all agree upon, which political realists would consider to be an ineffective method when it comes to engaging with and managing disagreement. Some people might not listen or may simply be unreasonable. Some people might listen, but if they disagreed with Dworkin's conclusions, Dworkin could only argue that these people are simply mistaken, which can be a counterproductive method of converting people to a cause. Swift does a good job (relative to the other texts) in talking to specific agents and addressing the limited power that these agents have. However, his argument is ultimately concerned with an 'egalitarian base', most of whom generally accept egalitarian principles. His argument is also ultimately concerned with the moral justification – and, often, lack of moral justification – of a particular kind of choice, which is of limited help for a political agent who wants to change the educational system by engaging in politics.

Engaging in moralistic political theory about a political issue provides little guidance to political agents, which is why these texts are ultimately problematic for a political realist. Political agents cannot rely on these texts to manage the disagreement they see in the arena of democratic politics. They provide little guidance for the political agent to generate meaningful coalitions to gain the power they need to make the world a more just place. Finally, they provide little guidance for political agents to use their power responsibly, which includes anticipating and avoiding the unintended consequences of any individual political agent's actions, and maintaining their position of power to prevent those with malicious intentions to use that power to make the world a more unjust place.

Theorising about political issues with an ethic of responsibility involves providing this direct guidance for political agents. One of the ways of doing this is questioning why certain principles are not being abided by and why certain policies are not being implemented. In cases where there is no democratic will to implement the policy, this task might not be so difficult. Opening all borders is not only a radical policy in terms of how different the world would look if it were achieved. It is also a radical policy because inclusive immigration regimes have been the subject of much heated political debate in today's world. If there is a democratic push back on an inclusive immigration

regime, it would be easy to understand why the most inclusive immigration policy is not an option on the table.

However, many cases are not as ‘radical’ as open borders. There are many positions that have not been implemented that are democratically popular. Answering the question why these positions are not being implemented can be more difficult than the radical case of open borders. Institutions such as voting procedures might make a difference. In majoritarian systems where two parties dominate, a popular policy might not be a priority for either party (or it might not be on offer in the first place). The majoritarian nature of the system makes it difficult for any single policy position to be implemented, as it needs to go through one of these major parties, who then must win most seats in parliament to even consider it. In some cases, volume matters. In today’s politics, there are many references to the ‘silent majority’. Who actually represents this silent majority is contestable, and many politicians abuse the term for their own electoral success/survival. However, government policies can have disproportionate costs on a minority. The benefits of the policy might be far greater than the costs, but the benefits are distributed amongst a larger group of people. These policies create much more ‘vocal minorities’ who care greatly about the issue and are willing to consistently lobby the government. Due to the disparate nature of the benefits, few people might be willing to uphold the other side of the debate with as much passion and energy.

In some cases, a lack of assurance makes it difficult for individual actors to act in ways that benefit society. If I act as a ‘first mover’ in these situations, it might place a significant burden on me, but with no guarantee that others will jump on the bandwagon to generate change. For example, imagine I was a parent who had a child in a private school (but believed that we should ultimately abolish private schools). If I act as a ‘first mover’ in this situation and withdraw my child from the private school and send them to the local state school, this might place certain burdens on them (and me), particularly in their access to social capital. However, if no one follows my lead, there might be little to no effect on the educational system. I as a parent might want some assurance that others will follow suit before I am willing to withdraw my child from the private school (or I may wait to make sure that others have withdrawn their children before withdrawing mine).

The aim of this section is not to develop every possible explanation for why things happen (or don't happen) in politics. But I will conclude this discussion with one more explanation. The generic explanation can be as simple as the concentration of power and self-interest. A group of people with power and influence benefits from the status quo and is willing to use that power to maintain the status quo. There are many examples of this in politics. Campaign finance reform is democratically very popular, yet it rarely raises its head in institutional political settings (Confessore and Thee-Brenan, 2015). The same can be said for voting procedures in majoritarian democracies. Both sides of a two-party state have a bi-partisan interest in leaving the voting procedure alone, regardless of who is in power. The main point is that, as mentioned before, to theorise about politics with an ethic of responsibility, there needs to be an accurate model of the political landscape. If you want to pursue a goal (a more just educational system), what (or more importantly, who) are the main obstacles? What do they have and what do they want?

Politics is about action and the art of the possible. The next question is (a) what should I do to use the political landscape to achieve socially desirable goals? or (b) how can I change the political landscape so that it would be supportive of your particular socially desirable goals? Political scientists might be much better at this type of analysis. However, for Williams, to claim a division of labour between these two tasks is not enough. The political scientists can provide a better model of the political landscape (in terms of power and interest), but this does not mean that their policy recommendations are going to be normatively desirable or coherent. The realist wants to break this Manichaeian divide because politics (and what motivates political action) is about both interest and principle.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ To a certain extent, I think Williams is exaggerating the divide between political science and political philosophy. There are political scientists who talk about human behaviour without relying purely on 'the pork barrel', whilst political philosophers are not always so 'high-minded'. However, I think it is safe to say that the feasibility constraint that political scientists work with is much stronger than the feasibility constraint in normative theorising for most political philosophers. Because of this, I think it is also safe to say that political scientists might have less normatively desirable policies (or their policies might not cohere with principles that should regulate society overall), while political philosophers have policies that are not as feasible, but are much more desirable. I think Williams's main point is that there should be more of an integrated approach between these two fields.

4. 5 - Conclusion

To avoid one of the main problems in the methodological literature, this chapter discussed how the political realist critique applied to three specific examples of political theory. These examples were chosen because they discussed politically salient issues. If the political realist critique applied to these examples, it would pertain to other forms of political philosophy that were far more abstract and idealised.

Each of the texts had elements that would have appealed to political realists. For example, Carens and Swift exclude first best solutions from their discussion because they recognise that there simply isn't the political will to implement them. However, there are many features of these works to which the political realist critique still applies. Carens's discussion of the immigration discourse is too idealised. Swift's main focus is on the morally permissible behaviour of parents. Dworkin tries to deal with disagreement through abstraction rather than through contextualisation. These features (along with others) make these texts inadequate guides for political agents to deal with the circumstances of politics and radical disagreement. I ended the chapter with a quick comparison of the texts, their similarities and differences, along with a summary of how the political realist critique applies to them.

As stated in the introduction, I believe the political realist critique applies to these texts. The question is whether this is problematic for these texts. Does the application of the political realist critique to these texts make these texts somehow inappropriate or defective? I do not think so. There are many questions we can ask in political philosophy. It seems strange to believe that all forms of political philosophy have to engage with the circumstances of radical disagreement. The aim of next chapter is to discuss this idea. What can a political moralist say in response to the political realist position and the political realist critique?

Chapter 5 – What Should Political Theory Be? A Moralism Response

So far, I have tried to develop a clear and plausible account of the political realist position and the critique of political moralism. The development of this account has involved a lot of critical engagement with the literature on political realism. However, there has not been much discussion of what a political moralist would say in response. The aim of this chapter is to develop the moralist response. There are two main claims that I will defend in this chapter. The first is that there not much of a gap between the political realist position and the political moralist one because no sensible political moralist would reject the ethic of responsibility. It might be true that their theories of justice are not directly helpful for political agents to act in politically responsible ways. As mentioned in the previous chapter, even non-ideal theories might be considered too ‘structural’ to be helpful guides for political agents in circumstances of radical disagreement. However, this is not the same as saying that they reject the ethic of responsibility.

The second claim I want to defend in this chapter is that we should be cautious when it comes to restricting political theory and what it should be. Political realists try to limit the definition or purpose of political theory in a way that is problematic. John Dunn argues that the “purpose of political theory is to diagnose practical predicaments and to show us how best to confront them”, which is why the contextualism associated with theorising about politics is so important (Dunn, 1990, 193). Raymond Geuss argues that “political philosophy must be realist” (Geuss, 2008, 9, emphasis mine). Rossi and Sleat argue that “realists maintain that political theory should begin (in a justificatory rather than temporal sense) not with the explication of moral ideals (of justice, freedom, rights, etc.), which are then taken to settle the questions of value and principle in the political realm but in an (typically interpretative) understanding of the practice of politics itself. Mainstream moralist political philosophy fails, from the realist perspective, to take seriously enough the peculiarities of the political and in doing so is unable to appreciate the complexity of the causal and normative relationship between morality and politics” (Rossi and Sleat, 2014, 690, emphasis mine). These are quite restrictive accounts of what political theory should be. There is a big difference between ‘it would be good if more work was done in political philosophy that was more political’ and ‘political theory must be realist’. One of the main goals of this thesis is to show that this constraint is

implausible. I agree with Andrew Mason when he argues that “Political theory is a diverse field, accommodating highly abstract inquiries that aim to identify fundamental normative principles by putting to one side facts about our natures and the circumstances in which we live, as well as more grounded forms of reflection that begin by paying close attention to the political problems we face and then seek guidance from the normative principles that are immanent in our practices” (Mason, 2016, 32). In other words, I believe it is important to defend a “qualified pluralism that recognises value in a variety of approaches and resists arguments that purport to show that one particular approach should occupy a privileged position” (Mason, 2016, 32).

5.1 - Intractable Disagreement or Can We All Get Along?

Many disagreements in the methodological disputes are not as stark as theorists believe. When Betty argues that political theory is about what the state should do and Bob claims that political theory is about what we should think, there are two ways of interpreting the disagreement between these individuals. We can either say that one of them is correct and the other is wrong, which means we either must accept that political theory is about what the state should do or it is about what we should think. Another way to interpret this disagreement is that they are merely interested in different questions. There are questions with regards to what the state should do, and there are other interesting questions about what we should think. The first interpretation of their disagreement is exclusive regarding what political theory is, while the second is inclusive. I believe a much stronger argument is needed to maintain the exclusive interpretation of this disagreement between Bob and Betty. It might be true that one question is more ‘valuable’ than the other. However, this is different from saying that we should not ask the other question.

Valentini sets up two opposing positions in the methodological disputes, which she refers to as ‘utopophobia’ and ‘factophobia’. Utopophobes are people who find theories of justice that set moral standards unlikely ever to be achieved problematic. For example, Galston argues that “realists reject [moralistic political theory] on the grounds that it is utopian in the wrong way – that it does not represent an ideal of political life achievable under even the most favourable circumstances” (Galston, 2010, 387). Valentini describes how “Utopophobes, in Estlund’s understanding, problematically

compromise normative principles in order to accommodate empirical realities. If it turns out that people are unlikely to conform with what morality requires, utopophobes let them off the hook” (Valentini, 2017, 12). On the other extreme are what Valentini defines as ‘factophobes’. She defines factophobia as “the tendency to elaborate normative principles under deeply counterfactual assumptions. This tendency, it is argued, results in the development of normative principles that are either misguided or counterproductive in real-world circumstances” (Valentini, 2017, 12). She goes through several disagreements between these positions and shows how there is no one clear answer to these disagreements. It is more plausible to believe that how factophobic or utopophobic we should be depends on the particular question being asked. We can go through a few of these examples to stress this point.

5. 1. 2 - Different Functions of a Theory of Justice

One debate she discusses is the ‘function of a theory of justice’, namely whether a theory of justice “can be purely evaluative, or whether it must also be normative” (Valentini, 2017, 20). She gives the case of *Tim and Tom*.

Tim and Tom: Tim and Tom are stranded on two separate islands. Tim has plenty of food, water, and resources. Tom lives in conditions of dire need. Their difference in resources and wellbeing is a sheer matter of luck. What is more, it is physically impossible for Tim to transfer resources over to Tom, or for Tom to move to Tim’s island.

In this case, some theorists of justice believe that Tim and Tom’s situation is unjust. For them, justice is purely evaluative, which means that if there is a disparity in resources, even if no one has committed a wrong, and there is no one who can rectify that wrong, it is still correct to say that the situation is unjust. There are those who say that while Tim and Tom’s situation is regrettable, it is not unjust. For these theorists, justice “always requires reference to *actual* rights and duties. Saying that a certain state of affairs is unjust, for them, implies that (i) someone’s rights have been violated and (ii) some agent has failed to act on the duties correlative to those rights” (Valentini, 2017, 20-21).

I agree with Valentini when she states that “as long as one is clear about the *sense* in which one is using the notion of justice and why, I find it unnecessary to take a stand

on whether this notion [justice] may *only* refer to normative, or also to purely evaluative claims” (Valentini, 2017, 21). Like Bob and Betty’s disagreement at the beginning of this section, we can either interpret this disagreement in an exclusive or inclusive way. Considering the plausibility of both positions, we should interpret the disagreement in an inclusive manner.⁵⁰

5. 1. 3 – *Can Theories of Justice be Action-Guiding?*

Many other disagreements in the methodological debates can be thought of in this way. We can say a similar thing to the claim that political moralism is ‘useless’. There are many ways of interpreting the criticism that political moralism is useless. One way of interpreting the claim is that ideal theories of justice are too abstract or too idealised to guide action in the real world, especially under conditions of radical disagreement. As North explains the charge, political realists argue that

“justice is not capable of guiding actions of political actors because it is unsuited to the practical circumstances of real politics. Underlying this claim is the belief that theories of justice of the kind typified by Rawls are designed for an idealized society in which all citizens comply fully with the demands of justice. Realists argue that this assumption of full compliance renders a theory of justice incapable of guiding action because real world politics is characterized by noncompliance, and this affects what citizens and political leaders ought to do. A theory of justice cannot provide useful guidance because its failure to take account of noncompliance means that any recommendations it offers are at best useless and at worst dangerously misleading” (North, 2017, 75)

I believe this charge is exaggerated but ultimately true. The charge is exaggerated because even ideal principles can be action-guiding in a direct sense. North uses an example of how Amy should vote in a referendum which asks, “whether political parties and political campaigning should be funded publicly or by (unlimited) private

⁵⁰ Valentini does accept that there might be “*strategic* reasons for wanting to use justice only in relation to key rights and duties, without overexpanding its reach. If matters of justice are meant to be particularly serious, and are typically thought to convey wrongdoing, in order not to rob this term of its moral force, we should probably use it only sparingly in a purely evaluative sense” (Valentini, 2017, 21). However, I believe these strategic reasons are not strong enough to claim that it would be wrong or defective to use justice in its purely evaluative sense. At best, it gives us reasons to be cautious about using it in this way too often.

contributions” (North, 2017, 77). He is right to say that Amy might find that “Rawls’s first principle explains that political institutions are just only when they provide citizens with a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties, with fully adequate being understood to include fair value of the political liberties” and that public financing of elections is consistent with this principle, whilst unlimited private contributions are not (North, 2017, 77). This means that an ideal principle of justice (IE – Rawls’s first principle of justice) can generate clear action-guiding verdicts (in this case, how Amy should vote in this referendum).

However, the reason I say the criticism is ultimately correct is that Rawls’s principle of justice says nothing about how we can achieve a referendum on public financing in the first place, which is an issue of power rather than uncertainty about whether public financing is justified. If there were to be a referendum in the foreseeable future, polling data suggests that those in favour of radical reform of the funding of elections would win quite easily (Confessore and Thee-Brenan, 2015). Most people would probably reach this conclusion without relying on Rawls’s first principle of justice for their justification of how they should vote. However, the reason why this referendum has not happened yet is that there are those with power who benefit quite substantially from the current system of electoral financing. How should political agents deal with this form of non-compliance? How can a reasonable political agent generate a significant enough coalition of people to push back against the power of these non-compliant agents? Political realists are more interested in these types of questions, and they are ultimately correct that principles of justice will have a difficult time guiding political agents engage with issues of ‘real politics’ of the kind described above.

5. 1. 4 - Should That Always Be the Goal?

The question that we need to answer, however, is why political theories should be useful in this specific way? Aren’t there other questions we can ask in political theory that might not directly guide political agents in this way, but we can still consider being valuable? In the previous chapter, one of the books I applied the political realist critique to was Swift’s book on school choice. I showed how there is a sense in which the political realist critique applies to the arguments in the book. However, why should every book on political theory be geared towards directly guiding political agents? Is it not worth talking about the morality of school choice, what the state should do

(regarding the education system), and ask whether parents are acting hypocritically if they send their children to private schools when they have strong political views about social mobility? There are other questions for which Swift's book would be quite useful, even if they are not the ones that political realists are interested in. More needs to be said about why there is something wrong with Swift engaging in questions of this kind rather than the kind that political realists believe theorists should be engaging in.

The questions I listed above are also practical questions, in the sense that if a parent were to read Swift's book on the morality of school choice, they would presumably be in a better position to make the best choice for their child and their moral and political views. However, it would be strange to believe that political philosophy necessarily has to be practical at all. Even some political realists admit that "there should be no shame, for scholars and intellectuals, in acknowledging that one's main purpose is, frankly, intellectual" (Sabl, 2017, 381). We can imagine questions that political theorists are interested in which have little to no practical implications for us at all. To use a silly example, a political theorist might be interested in the question of what the ideal society of aliens would look like, aliens who had very different features from human beings. This alien normative analysis might be a purely intellectual exercise and have no practical implications for us in our world with human beings. However, there might be intellectual or intrinsic value to having this knowledge. It is important to note that I am not suggesting that this type of theorising is equally as valuable as Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*. I am simply stating that it is not clear why there is something wrong with someone engaging in this type of theorising. G. A. Cohen gives the strongest rejection of Peffer's statement that "the entire *raison d'être* of moral, social, and political philosophy and theory, in general, and theories of social justice, in particular, is to guide our action practice" by stating that even if guiding practice is *a* principal aim, "it does not follow that *all* questions within political philosophy are directed to that aim, that the stated aim is political philosophy's '*entire* *raison d'être*'. One may or may not care about practice, but one may also care about justice, as such, one may be interested in what it is, even if one does not care about practice at all" (Cohen, 2008, 306).

5. 2 - Ought Implies Can

Another disagreement Valentini analyses, which is related to this idea that moralistic philosophy is 'useless', is the disagreement about 'ought implies can'. For example, Griffin argues that "difficulty, if great enough, turns into impossibility; and that is so in many intermediate cases" (Griffin, 2015, 39). He acknowledges that there are extreme cases of virtuous human beings. For example, "Father Kolbe sacrificed his life in Auschwitz" to save others (Griffin, 2015, 39). However, this does not mean that he can do the same thing, "nor does it show that most human beings can" (Griffin, 2015, 39). Many utopian theories generate ought claims that most human beings will not abide by. His argument is based on the idea that many forms of partiality are what make life worth living, such as friendship, family, and a deep commitment to certain institutions, causes, and projects (Griffin, 2015, 39). There are a few who are virtuous enough to be so impartial that they are willing to sacrifice these things that make life worth living. However, most of us 'cannot', and therefore, for most people, we ought not to strive for complete impartiality.

Factophobes can either argue that ought implies can is not a desideratum of a theory of justice, reject the idea that ought implies can, or argue that the most plausible interpretation of ought implies can is about literal human capabilities rather than how most people will most likely act. A theory of justice that is purely evaluative can readily accept that 'ought implies can' is not a desideratum of their theory. Not everyone will be willing to take this route. Many normative theorists agree that ought implies can. However, they will disagree with political realists about how we should interpret the 'can' in 'ought implies can'. Some take an expansive interpretation and say 'can' refers to "overall human agential possibility" (Valentini, 2017, 25). G. A. Cohen argues that we could literally be more egalitarian and live up to the demands of equality. However, he also acknowledges that we will not. This does not mean that there is no ought, because merely because 'we will not' does not mean that we 'cannot' (Cohen, 2008). Estlund similarly argues that "even zero probability that an action will be performed does not entail inability. The reason is that, recall, zero probability does not entail difficulty" (Estlund, 2014, 119).

Who has the better interpretation of ought implies can? I agree with Valentini that there are good reasons to be more optimistic rather than pessimistic about human nature and motivation when we say ‘ought implies can’. However, this does not mean that we cannot ask normative questions with differing levels of human motivation and capability. It is difficult to tell who is correct in this debate about ought implies can. As Wiens argues “given the number of variables to which our feasibility assessments must be sensitive, the complexity of their interactions, and the potential for path dependence, determining whether any particular long-range objective is feasible is beyond human cognitive capacity” (Wiens, 2015, 467). Rawls states explicitly that “the limits of the possible are not given by the actual ... we have to rely on conjecture and speculation, arguing as best we can that the social world we envision is feasible and might actually exist, if not now then at some future time under happier circumstances” (Rawls, 1999, 12). Given this uncertainty, “we do not want non-conclusively-justified pessimism about human nature to make our theories of justice less ambitious, and our ideals more status-quo biased” (Valentini, 2017, 25). However, a political realist might be asking the question ‘what should a political agent do when they know that others will not comply with their moral duties and when they are concerned with their own political survival?’ We might say that political realists are more interested in questions of what is reasonably likely will happen, and if political realists are clear about these conditions, there is no problem with this.⁵¹

The previous paragraph responded to the pessimist about human nature by stating that it was impossible to know with certainty that something was completely infeasible, and therefore we should be inclined to be more optimistic about human nature rather than pessimistic. However, even if we knew that a certain ideal was impossible, this does not mean that that ideal is necessarily problematic for political theorists. There are good reasons to discuss impossible ideals, and they may have practical relevance. In discussing the question ‘is there a role for impossible ideals?’, Griffin cites Tolstoy, who states “Ethics has two parts. There is an ethics of rules with which we are expected to, and can, comply: for example, the Ten Commandments. But there is also an ethics of ideals, such as the one Jesus set us: ‘Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven

⁵¹ There might be reasonable disagreement about what is reasonably likely to happen. But anyone who is engaging in more realistic political philosophy will accept this.

is perfect” (Griffin, 2015, 41). We know we can never be perfect like God. However, we should strive to be as close to the ideal as possible. Griffin rejects the idea that these impossible ideals have a role by rejecting the idea that we should come as close to total impartiality as possible. He rejects the claim that “we should, as much as we can, have to turn ourselves into egalitarians detached from commitments to any particular persons and projects” because “it is not an ideal” and “we should be too likely simply to produce an emotional wreck” if we tried due to our psychological limitations (Griffin, 2015, 42).

Griffin might be right to reject the impossible ideal of total impartiality. However, this might not have been the best ideal to use to answer to the question ‘is there a role for impossible ideals?’ There are better options available which might lead to an affirmative answer to that question. For example, imagine someone stated that we should get rid of all wrongdoing. We know that this will never happen. However, we should strive as close to that ideal as possible (as long as our pursuit coheres with other ideals such as freedom and equality; no one would say we should pursue this ideal no matter the cost. Presumably accepting that we should pursue this ideal no matter the cost would lead to much wrongdoing). It would be strange to argue that because we know this ideal is impossible, this ideal is wrong, and what we should instead be striving for is a world with only 10% wrongdoing.

5. 2. 2 - Ought Implies Can Part II – Epistemic Realism

Political realists do not necessarily have to take this route, but in theory, they could argue that ‘ought implies can’ also applies to the level of knowledge that people have. Political realists argue that we need to take into account the epistemic limitations of real people if we want to make ought claims for real people. For example, Sluga claims that political judgments “are not made from a god’s-eye view but by persons with a limited grasp of their situation, with restricted capacities and opportunities, and with specific needs, interests, and desires, by persons who, in addition, may be aware of some of their limitations and biases as they are making their judgments” (Sluga, 2014, 14). Griffin provides several arguments about how consequentialism is implausible because, while we can make accurate cost-benefit analyses for small-scale choices, he doubts that “we could perform the tremendously large-scale cost-benefit calculations that [consequentialism] requires or even arrive at probabilities reliable enough for action” (Griffin, 2015, 44-45). Rule Consequentialists face a similar problem. If their goal is to

answer the question “what set of rules and what set of dispositions would, if they were to prevail in one’s society, produce best consequences over society at large and in the long run?”, due to the difficulty of calculation, Griffin argues that we might be able to rule out some “obviously inadequate rules and dispositions, but there will be many left that we cannot rank” (Griffin, 2015, 46). Finally, he answers the question ‘could there be a capacity-blind ethics?’ by stating

In the following sense, no. If a full normative ethics must include norms for actually living our lives, then these norms would either have to be derived from the capacity-blind principles or, if they cannot be, or if there are none, they will have to be worked out in some other way. And if consequentialist reasoning proves to have limits too numerous or too much at the heart of ethics to do the job, we must face the question: what might reasonably take its place? (Griffin, 2015, 59)

There are many things that a consequentialist could say in response to Griffin. My aim here is not to defend consequentialism. My aim is to reject the argument that ‘ought implies can’ means that “we cannot base morality on forms of thought that we cannot carry out to a degree of probability on which we should be willing to base our lives” (Griffin, 2015, 59). It is true that there is something strange about saying that if someone could not know something in their decision-making process and end up doing something wrong, we can still say they should have done otherwise. We can use a simple case to explain this intuition. Imagine unknown to Sally, someone has wired her light switch so that if she flicks it to turn on the light, it will trigger an explosion which will kill Betty. Sally does not know this, nor is there any way that she could know that her light switch was wired in such a way. There seems something strange in saying that Sally has acted wrongly when she flicks her light switch and kills Betty.

However, Griffin ignores the fact that there are different ways in which we can talk about morality and whether specific acts are right or wrong. Parfit sets out three ways in which we can use the term ‘wrong’, namely the fact-relative sense, the evidence-relative sense, and the belief-relative sense. An act would be wrong in the fact-relative sense when “this act would be wrong in the ordinary sense if we knew all of the morally relevant facts” (Parfit, 2011, 150). An act is wrong in the evidence-relative sense when “this act would be wrong in the ordinary sense if we believed what the available evidence

gives us decisive reasons to believe, and these beliefs were true” (Parfit, 2011, 151). And finally, an act is wrong in the belief-relative sense “when this act would be wrong in the ordinary sense if our beliefs about these facts were true” (Parfit, 2011, 150). Parfit’s main argument in making these distinctions is that “we ought to use ‘wrong’ in all these senses. If we do not draw these distinctions, or we use only some of these senses, we shall fail to recognise some important truths, and we and others may needlessly disagree” (Parfit, 2011, 151).

He goes through a case of a bad doctor trying to harm you as an example to show what can be gained from using these multiple forms of wrong and right. Compare

Case One, I give you some treatment that I believe and hope will save your life,
but which kills you, as it was almost certain to do,

and that, in

Case Two, I give you some treatment that I believe and hope will kill you, but
which saves your life, as it was almost certain to do. (Parfit, 2011, 152)

If we used wrong only in the belief relative sense, “it is enough to claim that I acted rightly in *Case One*, because I did what I believed would save your life, and that I acted wrongly in *Case Two*, because I did what I believed would kill you” (Parfit, 2011, 153). However, Parfit believes this is insufficient for our moral analysis of the doctor. He claims that we should also say that the doctor acted wrongly in the fact-relative and evidence-relative senses in *Case One* and that in *Case Two* the doctor acted rightly in both the fact-relative and evidence-relative senses (Parfit, 2011, 153). He continues with another example of how a certain medical treatment almost always cures or kills people who have a particular disease.

Case Three, I give you some treatment that is almost certain to kill you, but which
saves your life, as I hoped and unjustifiably believed that it would,

and that, in

Case Four, I give you some treatment that is almost certain to save your life, but
which kills you, as I hoped and unjustifiably believed that it would.

From an evidence-relative sense, we can say that in *Case Three* I acted wrongly whilst in *Case Four* I acted rightly. However, this seems insufficient for our moral analysis of these cases. In *Case Four*, “we should also claim that I acted wrongly in the belief-relative and fact-relative senses, by *murdering* you. Murders should at least be mentioned” (Parfit, 2011, 153-4).

Finally, if someone argues that all we need is to use the term right and wrong in the fact-relative sense, Parfit gives another case,

Case Five, I give you some treatment that, as I justifiably believe, is almost certain to save your life, but which in fact kills you.

In this case, Parfit believes it is not enough to say that, because I killed you, I acted wrongly. He believes “we should also claim that I acted rightly in the belief-relative and evidence-relative senses. It is morally important that I justifiably believed that my act was almost certain to save your life” (Parfit, 2011, 153).

We do not have to go through every case that Parfit describes when he discusses moral concepts such as right and wrong. However, the important point is that we should not necessarily limit ourselves to using the terms right and wrong in any one of these senses. We should be able to use all these senses of the terms right and wrong.

We can now return to Griffin’s analysis. It is true that moral reasoning is complicated and may include many considerations that we might miss in our moral deliberation. When a philosopher sits in an armchair and has the time and training to deliberate on what they should do in hypothetical thought experiments, they will most likely reach better conclusions than the ones that regular political agents with time constraints will reach. There does seem to be something intuitively unfair about judging regular political agents with time constraints negatively because they could not have reached the same outcome of moral deliberation. However, this does not necessarily mean that consequentialism is wrong (for the sake of argument, let us assume that consequentialism is the right moral theory for now). It might be true that from a belief-relative and evidence-relative sense, we cannot always reach the conclusions that consequentialism wants us to reach in our moral deliberation. However, we can still say, in a fact-relative sense that an individual has acted wrongly if they act in a way that did not create the best consequences. It might be true that political realists are more

interested in questions about what we should do, given the epistemic limitations of most people, and this is an interesting question that should be asked. However, they cannot deny that we should also be able to ask questions about what political agents should do if they knew all of the morally relevant facts. As long as we are relatively clear about the parameters in which we use moral terms, it seems more plausible to argue that political theory is a diverse field with multiple approaches, rather than saying that ‘ought implies can’ excludes many forms of political theory we see today.

5. 3 - Different Tasks and Different Questions

One of the strange aspects of the methodological disputes is that there seems to be an assumption that people are asking the same or very similar questions, which is why there can be comparisons amongst the different methodologies. It is worth providing a few examples to show that this is a relatively widespread belief. Sleat argues that theories of liberalism “fail to take into account important truths about politics and, in doing so, provide either an incomplete account of the political or one that cannot be suitably normative and action-guiding for us when considering how to act. The reality of political life is simply very different from what liberal political theory has taken it to be” (Sleat, 2013, 1). When contrasting the political realist position to the liberal theories just described, Sleat believes that “politics looks fundamentally different if viewed through this realist rather than a liberal lens ... realism represents a profoundly different vision of the political from contemporary liberalism” (Sleat, 2013, 2). In more recent work, he makes the case that political realism “has important ramifications for how we understand and theorise politics” and is “critical of a particular way of doing normative ‘political’ theory that, it turns out, is actually deeply unpolitical” (Sleat, 2018, 5-8). Honig claims that most political theorists displace politics because they “assume the task of political theory is to resolve institutional questions, to get politics right, over, and done with, to free modern subjects and their sets of arrangements [from] political conflict and instability” (Honig, 1993, 2). When Geuss rejects an ethics-first approach, he is rejecting “a much more specific view about the nature and structure of ethical judgment and its relation to politics, and in particular a theory about where one should start in studying politics, what the final framework for studying politics is, what it is reasonable to focus on, and what it is possible to abstract from. ‘Politics is applied ethics’ in the

sense that I find objectionable means that we start thinking about the human social world by trying to get what is sometimes called an ‘ideal theory’ of ethics” (Geuss, 2008, 6). Finally, Bourke argues that “a science of government cannot be erected on the foundations of moral theory” and that “theories of moral justification ... cannot supply any kind of basis for a science of politics” (Bourke, 2009, 107). He rejects the “ethical turn in political philosophy” which collapses “political rule into a species of moral administration” (Bourke, 2009, 86).⁵²

As the many examples show, political realists seem to believe that political moralists and realists are engaging in the same, or at least very similar tasks, which is why they find the way that political moralists engage in this task of theorising about politics problematic. If this is true, political realists would have a solid case to make. If we say politics is what political realists say it is, and political moralists were trying to theorise about politics by offering their ideal theories of justice, or by treating the political as “an instrument of the moral”, it seems unlikely that those would be good theories of politics (*IBWD* 2). Alternatively, more accurately, if moralists perceived political rule and public administration as purely a species of moral administration, they would fail to meet the standards of the ethic of responsibility.⁵³ However, rather than thinking of everyone as engaging in the same or even a similar question, it might just be more useful to say that there are different tasks within the realm of political theory, and political moralists are interested in others.

The best way to discuss what sort of tasks moralists are engaging in can be found in a distinction set out by Waldron. Waldron argued that there are at least two tasks in political philosophy; “(i) theorising about justice (and rights and the common good etc.), and (ii) theorising about politics” (Waldron, 1999, 3). The aim of justice theorising is “to offer a coherent and persuasive vision of a society well-ordered by principles of justice and right” (Waldron, 1999, 2). In the process of creating this coherent and

⁵² It is important to note that it is not necessarily only political realists who make this conflation. Moralists can sometimes make the conflation as well, at least partially. For example, when Valentini defines utrophobes, she is referring to a “general attitude in thinking about justice” and lists “realists about political theory such as William Galston and Bernard Williams” as examples of utrophobes (Valentini, 2017, 16). In a way, this labelling suggests that Williams and Galston are interested in questions of justice rather than politics.

⁵³ As I will show later, this depends on having a poor definition of moral justification. No sensible moralist, and therefore no sensible account of moral administration, would reject the ethic of responsibility.

persuasive vision, “we do not expect anyone to dilute or compromise his vision by taking into account other rival theories of justice (theories which, after careful thought and on what he takes to be good grounds, he rejects as mistaken)” (Waldron, 1999, 3). Valentini argues that “in its general form, justice concerns what *agents are owed*” and theories of justice can tell “us under what conditions society is just (evaluation)” and set “out duties falling on society’s major institutional structures, namely ‘the state’ (prescription)” (Valentini, 2017, 14). The aim of theorising about politics is “to examine philosophically, not just the metaphysics, but the morals and politics of disagreement – the implications for social life, social organisation, and social action of the fact that even among those who accept the proposition that some views about justice are true and false, disagreement will persist as to which is which” (Waldron, 1999, 3).

The quickest way to defuse the political realist critique of moralistic political theory is to argue that political realists are “barking up the wrong tree” (Sleat, 2013, 8). If someone is concerned with finding out what justice is, the question of how we achieve that conception of justice here and now is simply a different question. Estlund describes this response quite clearly when he states “if a theory of social justice is offered, and it is objected, ‘but you and I both know people will never do that,’ I believe the right response is (as a starter), ‘I never said they would’” (Estlund, 2014, 114). The only political realist that I am aware of who has tried to respond to this charge directly is Sleat. It is worth quoting his response to this charge in full.

“Those who are engaged in the first task [theorising about justice] are attempting to set out what they take to be the most theoretically consistent, compelling, and persuasive account of justice. Such theorists will inevitably spend most of their time perfecting and presenting the arguments in favour of the principles of this conception of justice, answering the objections of critics, and criticising the arguments underpinning alternative accounts. While I think such theorists would still do well to recognise and attend to some of the discrepancies realists identify between several of their most fundamental theoretical assumptions and the reality of political life, realists need not disparage the aims and purposes of this first normative task. Indeed, those who are engaged in it can make, and often have made, important contributions to both academic and public political debates. What they do not address, and need

not given the nature of their set task, is how we are to proceed politically in the face of the disagreement that exists within our society about what justice is, and in which the theorist's voice is but one amongst a multitude of others all advocating different positions. This is, however, the question that preoccupies those who engage in the second task of political philosophy, the theorisation of politics itself, understood as an activity which is generated by and responds to the fact of political disagreement. What I want to emphasise here is not only the division of labour that this realist account provides, one which appreciates the value of the normative inquiry into the nature and content of justice (and other political concepts), but the theoretical distinction between politics and justice that it opens up as well. There is, on this account, 'logical space' between the substantive conception of justice one advocates and the political arena such that, while I do not stop advocating and promoting my own particular convictions, I nevertheless recognise that they are but one set of convictions amongst many others, and that politics is therefore required in order to help us reach a common decision." (Sleat, 2013, 8-9)

There are elements of this passage that are acceptable, but problematic for the political realist critique, and other elements of this passage that are implausible. We can start with the elements we should all find acceptable. Even though theorists of justice do not address certain questions, they "need not to given the nature of their set task" (Sleat, 2013, 8). Questions such as 'what is justice?' and 'what does it demand?' (to name a few) are interesting and important questions to ask. "Those who are engaged in [asking these questions] can make, and often have made, important contributions to both academic and public political debates." (Sleat, 2013, 8). Considering how this is true, "realists need not disparage the aims and purposes of this first normative task" (Sleat, 2013, 8). These statements are reasonable. However, they significantly reduce the impact of the political realist critique. They also change what or who the focus of the critique is. What more can really be said if we accept the importance of questions of the first task even if they provide no answer to the second? Political realists argue that "it is only a slight exaggeration to say that the concept of justice has dominated the subdiscipline and that theoretical reflection on almost every political issue of interest has been either funnelled through that concept (not necessarily always appropriately) or overlooked because they are not clearly related to it" (Sleat, 2018, 2-3). If this is true, I am sympathetic to the

political realist whose aim is to try and expand “the range of topics or questions that theorists address to include those that have either been obscured or wholly overlooked in recent years - such as questions about political possibility, political agency, compromise, political judgment, political institutions, and political responsibility” (Sleat, 2018, 4). However, this does not really sound like a critique of the theories of justice themselves. At best, political realism seems to be an ‘industry corrective’, in the sense that the political realist wants to say to other practitioners that too much attention has been focused on one issue, namely justice, and more work should be done on other areas, such as politics and disagreement.⁵⁴ We can have a debate about this too, but the disagreement seems much less critical. Most moralists could readily accept that the balance is skewed towards the first task over the second and that it would be good if someone (usually someone else) did more work to tip the scales. But this discussion shows how Sleat should accept that the political realist critique applies to the imbalance of focus in the field of political theory and its practitioners, rather than the theories of justice themselves.⁵⁵

We can move on to the parts of this passage that are problematic. The part that is most in need of defence is the last sentence, which states Sleat’s belief that there is a logical

⁵⁴ There is nothing intrinsically wrong with claiming this. Michael Walzer believes that communitarianism and the communitarian critique of liberalism plays a similar role. Fashion trends have “brief but recurrent lives”, and he believes the same is true for the communitarian critique of liberalism (Walzer, 2007, 96). Presumably what he means is that whenever liberal theory becomes ‘too individualistic’, the appeal of communitarianism the communitarian critique re-emerges.

⁵⁵ Even in this situation, where I might be sympathetic to the idea that there is an imbalance in the field of political theory between the two tasks, I find the political realist critique quite strange. Even recent publications by political realists admit that there has not been a lot of ‘positive’ or constructive work on political realism (Jubb, 2017). For example, Hall argues that “although the broad contours of the realist turn in political theory are now reasonably well understood, thus far most commentators have focused on the critical nature of the movement by examining realists’ opposition to the ‘applied-ethics’ programme that has dominated political philosophy/theory in recent decades. This focus has obscured the more constructive elements of realist political thinking, a neglect which perhaps explains why some scholars continue to mistakenly elide realism with non-ideal theory” (Hall, 2017, 284). We can ignore the confusing claim that the broad contours of realism are understood and yet some scholars continue to make the mistake of saying realism is the same as non-ideal theory. The point I find strange is that there is so much writing on why what everyone else is doing is wrong, but little work on how to do political theory properly. A much more convincing approach for someone who is a political realist and wanted others to also be realistic about politics would be to engage in the method clearly and on an interesting topic. This has the benefit of (a) having a clear roadmap for people to follow the political realist engage in theorising about politics and (b) inspiring others to theorise about politics in the way that political realists want.

space between the substantive conception of justice and the political arena. It depends on what Sleat means by this logical space. It is unclear based on this passage. If by logical space, we mean that there are two different tasks, one focused on justice, and the other focused on the political arena, this is a trivial logical space, one that we have already discussed in previous paragraphs. However, Sleat argues that there is a logical space in the sense that a political theorist recognises that their convictions are “but one set of convictions amongst many others, and that politics is therefore required in order to help us reach a common decision” (Sleat, 2013, 9). Again, this can be interpreted in two ways, one that is trivial and the other, controversial. The trivial way to interpret this statement is that in the domain of politics (radical disagreement), there will be people who disagree with my convictions. Therefore, we need politics, because even if I have the one true theory of justice, there will be people who disagree, who either need to be convinced or coerced. This argument seems trivial, even theorists of justice accept this claim. The other way of interpreting this claim is that, as a theorist of justice, I should consider my theory of justice (which let us assume for the sake of argument is the correct theory) as simply one opinion amongst many others. That seems strange. If I have thought about all the considerations and provided the strongest justifications for my theory of justice, should we treat my convictions the same as any other conviction that might exist in the political arena, regardless of the quality of reasons? Does it bear the same normative weight as the convictions of a Nazi? The answer is clearly no. There are times when political realists seem to imply yes to the question of how we should treat my convictions compared to other convictions in the political arena. The best example of this is Quentin Skinner, who argues that “ideological motivations [underlie] even the most abstract systems of thought” and because of this “no one is above the battle, because the battle is all there is” (Skinner, 2002, 6-7). Skinner's claim suggests that there is no objective vantage point from which we can analyse these different convictions and show how one is more objective than the other. I will discuss this criticism and what is problematic about it in the last chapter of my thesis, where I discuss the historicist scepticism that underlies most work in political realism. However, for now, it is sufficient to say that Sleat's response to the charge that political realists are simply barking up the wrong tree is very controversial.

5. 4 - It is not 'Political' - Does Anyone Reject the Ethic of Responsibility?

Political realists have argued that theories of justice that are not sensitive to the circumstances of radical disagreement that political agents face are not 'political' in the first place. Sleat appeals to a phrase attributed to Wolfgang Pauli, namely "that is not only not right, it is not even wrong" to emphasise this point (Sleat, 2016b, 252). His main argument is that "political philosophy ought to be appropriately guided by the phenomenon of politics that it seeks to both offer a theory of and, especially in its normative guise, offer a theory for" (Sleat, 2016b, 252). He makes this argument for focusing on 'political values'. He believes that they might originate from outside of politics, "but for them to function as values for the political domain, that is, become a value we aspire to realise in practice, a standard of evaluation against which we assess the actions of political agents, or a category through which we seek to understand political life, it must be possible for us to view them as consistent with its constitutive features." (Sleat, 2016b, 253-254). I have discussed what these constitutive features are in detail in chapter 1 and 2 of this thesis. The most important feature that Williams and Sleat repeatedly emphasise is that "politics is an attempt to provide order via *authority* and *legitimate coercion* in conditions of disagreement" (Sleat, 2016b, 255).

Political realists can point to the division of tasks, theorising about justice and theorising about politics, to make their point. Political realists are theorising about politics, which is why they are political philosophers. Theorists of justice are theorising about justice. If their theories of justice are not consistent with the constitutive features of politics, they are not engaging in political philosophy/theory. Instead, they are engaging in moral theorising about justice.

Before I discuss a straightforward response that moralist could provide, I want to discuss the idea of a theory of justice and its relationship with politics. I stated earlier on in this chapter that theorists of justice and theorists of politics are not asking the same questions. Theorists of justice are usually more interested in questions about what people are owed and entitled. Political realists are more interested in questions about what political agents should do under circumstances of radical disagreement. However, I believe it would be too quick to say that theorists of justice are not engaging in political theory and are instead engaging in applied moral theory. Theorists of justice tend to ask

questions about how the state should treat people. They discuss questions of political power, even if it is only to ask the question ‘what are the morally proper uses of political power?’ They might ask questions about institutional design; what sort of institutions would a just state have? When we open the newspaper to the politics section, there tends to be a discussion of what the state is doing, whether a use of power by President Trump goes past the moral boundaries that we have placed (or should have placed) on the proper use of political power, and so on. It seems strange to believe that they are not doing talking about something remotely related to the domain of what we usually refer to as politics. A political realist who directly guides a political agent's actions and a moralist who offers a theory of justice that delineates the role of the state and designs a set of just institutions are both technically theorising about politics in some way. The difference between the political realist and the theorist of justice is the fact that the political realist is theorising with an ethic of responsibility. Political realists care about how to guide political agents to obtain and maintain political power under circumstances of radical disagreement in order to achieve morally desirable outcomes, which is what it means to theorise with an ethic of responsibility. They are deeply concerned with the constitutive features of politics and being very contextual in location and time. Theorists of justice tend to theorise with an ethic of principle.⁵⁶

We can turn to the straightforward response that a moralist could provide in response to the claim that if a theory of justice does not acknowledge the constitutive features of politics, it is not ‘political’ at all. Political realists themselves accept that they “disagree, of course, about what politics is ‘really like,’ and, indeed, such disagreements are themselves a part of politics that any realistic analysis needs to take seriously” (Sleat, 2018, 2). Does the most plausible account of politics exclude political moralists from being political? If political moralists can show that they are discussing a particular element of the concept of politics, political realists need to accept that moralists are engaging in some form of political philosophy, and not ‘applied moral philosophy’. David Miller does this by listing some of the “many and diverse activities that we would routinely consider to be ‘political’”. Restricting the list to domestic democratic politics, we might include: the members of a constituent assembly writing or revising a

⁵⁶ As I will show later on in this chapter, theorising about justice with an ethic of responsibility tends to have a negative impact on the desirability of a theory of justice.

constitution ... a parliamentary or congressional committee scrutinising a proposed piece of legislation ... candidates for party leadership trying to win over rank and file members to their cause” (Miller, 2016, 160). According to Miller “all [these activities] involve, to varying degrees, discussion, negotiation, persuasion, and therefore, in a broad sense, the giving of reasons that are in turn susceptible to normative assessment. If, as I have been assuming, normative assessment of political institutions, procedures, laws, and policies, is the main task of political philosophy, there is no reason to think that the nature of politics precludes this” (Miller, 2016, 160). Political philosophers are generally engaged in the task of providing and assessing reasons. In politics, at least one central feature of politics is the provision of reasons that are in turn susceptible to normative assessment. The moralist could respond to Sleat by arguing that politics can mean many different things, and what moralists are doing is in fact in line with some (but not all) of the main features of politics.⁵⁷

Of course, an impatient political moralist can accept the fact that they are not doing ‘political’ political philosophy, because their accounts of justice, authority, and freedom are not sufficiently sensitive to the constitutive features of politics (in the way that Sleat wants). What happens when a moralist simply rewrites their business card to say, ‘normative/moral theorist about justice’ instead of ‘political philosopher’? Is there anything of significance lost in this change of title? We want disagreements in normative theory to be more than simply linguistic. If this is the only source of disagreement, the impatient moralist can this entire dispute by changing the title of their work to something like ‘theorising about justice’.

Sleat wants to argue that this issue is more than merely linguistic. He wants to argue that if political values are not consistent with the general conditions of politics, “by virtue of the fact that they are inconsistent with its necessary constitutive features they cannot be in any meaningful sense values for the political domain. There is a related but importantly different question that we might ask of political values also – whether it can

⁵⁷ Interestingly, Miller points out how Geuss implies something similar. For example, Geuss states “there is no single canonical style of theorising about politics. One can ask any number of perfectly legitimate questions about different political phenomena, and depending on the question, different kinds of enquiry will be appropriate” (Geuss, 2008, 17). For Miller, the important question is “For what kinds of questions about politics are *philosophical methods* of enquiry appropriate?” (Miller, 2016, 158)

be a value *for us* given facts of the political society of which we are part” (Sleat, 2016b, 260). He uses Williams’s discussion of ‘Saint-Just’s illusion’ to make this point. Saint-Just was a Jacobin leader who was “notorious for the zeal with which he conducted the Terror in his attempt to remake French society according to the ideals of civic virtue associated with the Roman Empire.” (Sleat, 2016b, 260). Sleat (or more accurately Williams) argues that Saint-Just wanted to impose republican ideals on French society that was not ready for those ideals, which Sleat argues shows Saint-Just’s failure in not just ethical understanding, but also historical interpretation. The “ancient conception of liberty employed by the Jacobins, which revolved around and depended upon very strong individual dedication to public life, was calamitously unsuited to the modern world” (Sleat, 2016b, 260). In other words, Saint-Just made the mistake of thinking that Roman republicanism belonged to “the space of our actual social and political life” instead of the space where “other conceptions of ideals and world pictures that human beings have had, and may perhaps still have elsewhere, which are not part of our social and political space, are not even starters for a life we might lead, and are – strictly in that sense – alien to us” (Williams, 1995, 139). However, at best, this seems like a normative argument about how we should pursue our ideals and not about the normativity and desirability of those ideals. Saint-Just had an ideal theory of Roman republicanism and made the mistake of pursuing that ideal theory without thinking about the consequences (or believing that any consequences were acceptable for the pursuit of the ideal). He showed that he had no ethic of responsibility, and France suffered because of it. He pursued his ideals through unjustifiable means, as a dictator rather than a democratic underlabourer.

All moralistic political philosophers accept some form of ethic of responsibility. They might have theorised about justice and politics with an ethic of principle. However, this does not mean that they reject the importance of context, especially when it comes to the application of their theories of justice. Few moralists would argue that their ideal theories of justice can be applied “straight off the bat” (Hall, 2013). If moralistic political philosophers somehow gained some access to the levers of power, they would recognise that there are many things they need to take into consideration, such as a state’s history and distribution of power. These are abstracted away from in the process of theorising about justice with an ethic of principle, but that does not mean that they would argue that people should pursue the ideal no matter the consequences. To apply his theory in

political practice, Rawls recognised the need for “political judgment guided by theory, good sense, and plain hunch” (*T&J*, 246). Simmons argues that “the conclusions of ideal theory, applied to particular injustices in particular societies, are likely to be somewhat speculative (and certainly nothing like simple deductions from those requirements conjoined with societal data)” (Simmons, 2010, 19).

Regarding Saint-Just’s illusion, it is more plausible to believe that Saint-Just (ideally) should have argued that we should hold Roman republicanism as a target or long-term goal and provided a non-ideal theory that can either (a) act as a transition towards these ideals from here and now, or (b) act as a theory of second-best if it is true that we cannot achieve the ideal in its fullest. In other words, when it comes to the application of their theories of justice, moralists would change their mindset and think about what should be done with an ethic of responsibility. Any sensible moralist would recognise that managing real world political disagreement is not the same as resolving disagreement in a normative sense akin to a discussion in a moral philosophy seminar. But it seems like the transitional theory or the theory of second best will require the ideal theory of Roman republicanism for its fullest justification.

Of course, Sleat can provide normative arguments against Roman republicanism as an ideal. Many political moralists are not Roman republicans and would be sympathetic to Sleat’s arguments against Roman republicanism. However, the normative arguments against Roman republicanism and his argument about Saint-Just’s illusion are insufficient to show how the disagreement between political realism and political moralism is more than linguistic. If the focal point of disagreement can be avoided merely by changing the name, it will be a pyrrhic victory.

5. 5 - What Impact does the Ethic of Responsibility Have on a Theory of Justice?

So far, I have been using the term ‘theorising about politics with an ethic of responsibility’ as a label for what political realists are advocating. However, what would it look like if someone theorised about justice with an ethic of responsibility? Can a theorist who is engaging in normative theory with an ethic of responsibility also construct a desirable theory of justice? I argue that ideal theorising about justice with an ethic of responsibility can make the theory less morally desirable, because the features of a desirable theory of justice tend to exclude the features that are pertinent for political

realists. Theorising about justice with an ethic of responsibility can lead us to compromise what we are morally entitled to with what is politically effective, which might make it more practical, but can make it less desirable. We can use an example to show the negative impact an ethic of responsibility has on what justice demands.

We can use the example of natural resources. There are at least two principles of natural resource ownership. The first is the principle of common ownership. This is the principle that states that the natural resources of the world belong to everyone. The second is the principle of popular sovereignty, which states that “the people of the country own the resources of the country” (Wenar, 2016, 194). When it comes to the entitlements of natural resources, which principle would the best/true/most reasonable theory of justice demand? Morally speaking, I believe it is challenging to make a case for the principle of popular sovereignty over the principle of common ownership. We know that the distribution of natural resources around the world is morally arbitrary. We know that it was luck that a people within a country found the natural resources under their ground. We know that where we are born and what citizenship we hold when we are born is morally arbitrary because it is based on luck. A theorist who supported the principle of popular resource sovereignty as the best principle of justice would have to provide plausible arguments for how all these features that we would consider to be morally arbitrary entitle a particular group of people to the natural resources found within their borders. The morally arbitrary nature of natural resource allocation around the world makes it more compelling to believe that natural resources belong to everyone.

There is a sense in which the principle of popular sovereignty is superior to the principle of common ownership. We could argue that we should hold the principle of popular sovereignty because strategically, it is a better principle to hold. Wenar argues that there are good political reasons to believe that natural resources belong to the country in which they are found. Firstly, the principle of popular resource sovereignty is “affirmed in many national constitutions and laws” (Wenar, 2016, 194). This is the case in Angola, Vietnam, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, and Iraq (among others). Secondly, at least in terms of rhetoric, the principle is affirmed by a wide range of political leaders with “completely different political persuasions” (Wenar, 2016, 194). Wenar provides examples of quotes from leaders of Australia, Brazil, Mexico, Iran, and Norway to name

a few. This suggests that arguments based on this principle will be much more persuasive to those who currently hold the levers of power. Finally, it can act as a very persuasive principle for individuals who might not be convinced by other means. For example, if I wanted to advocate more egalitarian principles in China by appealing to the value of democracy, people might respond to the advocacy with scepticism. It might be perceived as an imposition of Western values, or they might respond to recent election outcomes in the US and the UK to show how problematic democracy can be. However, if the advocacy was based on the principle of popular sovereignty (that companies were 'stealing' resources from them), this can more easily convince people to demand change and hold their leaders to account.

These are all good reasons to support the principle of popular sovereignty for natural resources. However, as mentioned before, I do not believe any sensible political philosopher rejects the ethic of responsibility. It might be true that moralists are more interested in other topics, but they would not deny that power plays a vital role in politics and that a principle like the principle of popular resource sovereignty would be a much more practical principle to advocate in today's political world (compared to the principle of common ownership of natural resources). This means that the two principles are not mutually exclusive. We can accept both principles. Regarding effective political strategy, one that acknowledges that role that power and disagreement play in politics, we can make the world a better place by advocating the principle of popular sovereignty. This would be better than pursuing the principle of common ownership, which people in power will just ignore. Concerning what the best/most reasonable/correct theory of justice demands, we can argue that the principle of common ownership is the better principle when asking what resources people are morally entitled to.

However, if a theorist of justice tried to theorise about what the most morally compelling conception of justice was and did so with an ethic of responsibility, they would have to conclude that the best principle is the principle of popular sovereignty. We should reject the principle of common ownership because it is incapable of countering power. This argument is implausible, especially when there is a more straightforward and more inclusive account I described above. This approach of theorising about justice with an ethic of responsibility leads us to determine people's entitlements based on power, which theorists of justice will find problematic.

5. 6 – Conclusion

My intention was not to go through every single possible response a political moralist could give in response to what we have discussed in the previous four chapters. Given the span of the literature in the methodological disputes of political theory, that would be an impossible task. However, I believe this chapter has shown that even when the political realist critique applies, it does not have to be devastating. Arguing for an exclusive and limited account of the field of political theory is much more difficult than political realists believe, and the arguments they have provided so far, I believe, are unsuccessful.

I started off by listing several tasks and functions that a theory of justice can play, such as the evaluation of institutions. I showed how political theories could be action-guiding, but even if they are not action-guiding in the way that political realists want, we should not always set the goal of political philosophy to be purely practical.

I then discussed some arguments that political realists might use to argue that when engaging in normative theory, it should be politically realistic. The first was a version of ‘ought implies can’ and how we should interpret that can as ‘something that most human beings can do’. I showed how ultimately this is not successful, and that the best interpretation of ‘ought implies can’ should be as inclusive as possible, especially since we do not know the limits of what is possible. I discussed another the epistemic version of the argument ‘ought implies can’. The way that a lot of moral philosophers engage in moral deliberation is too difficult (in some cases impossible) for real political agents to conduct. If I could not have known that I ought to have done something, how is it possible (assuming ought implies can) that I ought to have done that something? I show how this is true, but for only one conception of right and wrong. It might be that in a belief-relative sense because you did not know you ought to have done x, you were not morally obligated to do x. However, there are two other senses in which we can say something is right and wrong, namely the evidence- and fact-relative sense. I used Parfit’s examples to show how limiting ourselves to one of these senses of right and wrong can have a negative impact on our moral deliberation. For our moral deliberation to capture all the morally relevant features of a situation, we should be able to use all the senses of right and wrong.

I proceeded to show that political realists and the people they are criticising tend to be engaged in different tasks or asking different questions. Realists seem to believe that they are (ultimately) engaging in the same task, and I do not believe that is true. It is more accurate to say that the primary targets of political realism (political theorists such as Rawls and Dworkin) are interested in questions about what people are morally entitled to, what we owe to each other, and what the best distribution of benefits and burdens is, and not what the best way is to obtain these entitlements. This means two things. Firstly, we should not reject the answer to one question by saying it fails to answer the second. Secondly, as I showed at the end of this chapter, someone who tried to answer both questions at once (in other words, tried to theorise about justice with an ethic of responsibility), it would ultimately end up with a less morally desirable conception of justice.

Finally, this chapter argued that political realists seem to believe that political moralists reject the ethic of responsibility. It is true that when political moralists theorise about justice in ideal terms, it is difficult for a political agent to read their text and translate that into political practice. If the arguments I discussed in the previous chapter are accurate, even non-ideal theory versions of these ideal theories would not be very helpful for political agents facing difficult circumstances of radical disagreement. However, this is not the same thing as saying that they reject the ethic of responsibility. Given what their moral theories of justice demand, it would be implausible to believe that, under circumstances that political realists are interested in, political agents should pursue justice no matter the cost. Not only are political realists and moralists asking different questions, I do not believe a sensible political moralist would find the questions political realists are asking inappropriate. They would accept that the ethic of responsibility is a crucial ethic and would argue that political agents should exercise caution when attempting to translate their ideal theories of justice into political practice.

Chapter 6 – The Political Realist Critique and Rawls’s Political

Liberalism

The previous chapter argued that political theory is a broad and diverse field. Political theorists can ask many questions, and we should not try to limit political theory in the way that political realists want to. Theorising about politics with an ethic of responsibility is important. However, it is not plausible to claim that political theorists are doing something wrong merely because they are theorising about politics without an ethic of responsibility.

A political realist could accept this analysis but still argue that Rawls’s political philosophy fails to meet its own standards; only theorising about politics in the way that political realists advocate can meet the standards set by Rawls. The objection might go like this. Rawls claims that the question he wants to answer in his work on political liberalism is “how is it possible for there to exist over time a just and stable society of free and equal citizens, who remain profoundly divided by reasonable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines?” (PL, 4). This broad question implies that Rawls is saying that he is not just thinking morally about our entitlements, but also thinking politically about how to manage disagreement institutionally. He not only recognises the significant division caused by religious or moral doctrines, he also claims that an important aspect of his endeavour is to ensure that his solution will be ‘stable’. Rawls argued that one of the roles of political philosophy was to probe the “limits of practicable political possibility” (Rawls, 2007, 10-11). If his political liberalism is not stable, it will fail to meet Rawls’s own standard of ‘realistic utopianism’. Political realists might point at Rawls’s insistence on stability and claim that, due to the deep disagreement they take for granted as the starting point of politics, Rawls can never construct a set of liberal principles that can achieve an overlapping consensus.

If this claim is correct, there are at least two major implications. The first is that the political realist could argue that their critique applies to one of the most influential examples of political philosophy. More importantly, they could argue that Rawls fails to meet his own standard rather than one that is unfairly imposed upon him by political realists. Secondly, because of its influence, this might imply that the political realist critique also applies to many other forms of political philosophy, especially those inspired by Rawls’s work. A lot of Rawlsian political philosophy might also be unrealistic

in the sense that it fails to probe the limits of practicable political possibility. It might be argued that for anyone who believes that the best conception of justice should also be stable, the political realist critique applies to their theory. Only by engaging in normative theorising in the way that political realists do can theories of justice be stable.

This chapter will focus on Rawls's conception of stability. It will do two things. The first is to explain why someone might interpret Rawls in this way. I will do this by a discussion of Rawls's work during his 'political turn' and its discussion of political stability. I will also include some references to George Klosko's work on developing a liberal consensus from current democratic societies, as it relies on a similar conception of political stability. I will discuss some of the early literature on Rawls's political turn, including criticisms from Brian Barry and Joseph Raz, to show that many people have made a similar mistake in interpreting Rawls in this way. Finally, I will apply the political realist critique to this conception of Rawls's political liberalism. The second aim of this chapter will be to provide the best interpretation of Rawls's conception of stability, one that he ultimately developed in *Political Liberalism*. I will show that even though Rawls is concerned with stability, what he means by stability is very different from the way that political realists use the term stability. They are asking different questions, and as I argued in the previous chapter, more needs to be said about why Rawls political theory is wrong or is not 'political'.

6. 1 - Early Political Rawls on Stability

Before I discuss Rawls on stability, I will start by defining some terms. I will use the term 'Hobbesian stability' to refer to the way that political realists are concerned with political stability, namely that stability means managing deep disagreement that exists in the real world. By 'Early Political Rawls', I am referring to Rawls's analysis in his essay *The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus*. There may be other works by Rawls where he implies he is concerned with Hobbesian stability. However, for the sake of simplicity, I will focus on this essay as it does so most explicitly. By 'Rawls', I will refer to his work in *Political Liberalism*. There are papers written by Rawls before the publication of *Political Liberalism* that show that he changed his mind (or became clearer) about what he means by stability. For example, his essay *The Domain of the Political and Overlapping Consensus* has a discussion of stability that implies that he rejects Hobbesian stability as the standard

that his conception of justice should meet. However, for simplicity, I will focus on his most developed account *Political Liberalism*. Finally, I will refer to the conception of stability that Rawls ultimately endorses as ‘Rawlsian Stability’.

Early Political Rawls starts off by discussing Hobbes and how he addressed the “contentious divisions of his day between religious sects, and between the Crown, aristocracy and middle classes” (CP, 422). Early Political Rawls proceeds to argue that things are different today, as “we are the beneficiaries of three centuries of democratic thought and developing constitutional practice” (CP, 422). This suggests that he believed that his project of political liberalism was related to Hobbes’s project in the *Leviathan*. The main difference is that we have more empirical evidence about our motivations and our capacity to develop “some allegiance to democratic ideals and values, as realised in existing political institutions” (CP, 422). The connection between Early Political Rawls’s political and Hobbesian liberalism is made even clearer by the end of the paper, where he argues that “[political liberalism] steers a course between the Hobbesian strand of liberalism – liberalism as a *modus vivendi* secured by a convergence of self- and group-interests as coordinated and balanced by well-designed constitutional arrangements – and a liberalism founded on a comprehensive doctrine such as that of Kant or Mill ... by itself, the former cannot secure an enduring social unity, the latter cannot gain sufficient agreement” (CP, 446).

Early Political Rawls’s work is also ‘Hobbesian’ in the way that it discusses pluralism. He never qualifies the fact of pluralism with the term ‘reasonable’, and the pluralism he has in mind is the pluralism that exists today and emerges under liberal democratic institutions of today. For example, he claims that “this diversity of doctrines – the fact of pluralism – is not a mere historical condition that will soon pass away; it is, I believe a permanent feature of the public culture of modern democracies. Under the political and social conditions secured by the basic rights and liberties **historically associated** with these regimes, the diversity of views will persist and may increase” (CP, 425, emphasis mine). Early Political Rawls believes that this fact of pluralism is on par with the circumstances of justice.⁵⁸ He claims that “everyone recognises what I have called

⁵⁸ The circumstances of justice are important for most political theorists because “Unless these circumstances existed there would be no occasion for the virtue of justice, just as in the absence of threats of injury to life and limb there would be no occasion for physical courage.” (TJ, 110).

the historical and social conditions of modern democratic societies: (i) the fact of pluralism and (ii) the fact of its permanence, as well as (iii) the fact that this pluralism can be overcome only by the oppressive use of state power ... also seen as part of this common predicament is (iv) the fact of moderate scarcity and (v) the fact of there being numerous possibilities of gains from well-organised social cooperation ... All these conditions and assumptions characterise the circumstances of political justice” (*CP*, 445).

This sentence is pertinent for the political realist critique. As stated before, Waldron argued that there were at least two distinct tasks in political philosophy, namely theorising about justice and theorising about politics. In describing the task of theorising about politics, Waldron coined the useful term ‘circumstances of politics’ which played a similar role for theories of politics as the circumstances of justice did for theories of justice.⁵⁹ In my most recently quoted statement from *Early Political Rawls*, he merges the two into the ‘circumstances of political justice’ and argues that the task of political liberalism is to provide a solution for the problems raised by both sets of circumstances.

Given these ambitious requirements, *Early Political Rawls* repeatedly states his desire for a political conception of justice to be ‘practical’. He argues that “one reason for focusing directly on a political conception for the basic structure is that, as a **practical political matter**, no general or comprehensive view can provide a publicly acceptable basis for a political conception of justice” (*CP*, 424, emphasis mine). He claims that he needs to meet “the requirements of a workable conception of justice” (*CP*, 424).

Early Political Rawls’s concern for political practicality is most explicit when he discusses the relationship between politics and political philosophy. He argues that “some may think that to secure stable social unity in a constitutional regime by looking for an overlapping consensus detaches political philosophy from philosophy and makes it into politics. Yes and no: the politician, we say, looks to the next election, the statesmen to the next generation, and philosophy to the indefinite future. Philosophy

He follows Hume’s analysis that the circumstances of justice are the conditions of limited altruism and moderate scarcity. (*CP*, 445)

⁵⁹ As a simple reminder, the circumstances of politics refer to the fact “that widespread disagreement over matters of justice is likely to persist even if there is a particular set of principles that are best defended or the most reasonable” (Mason, 2010, 659)

sees the political world as an ongoing system of cooperation over time, in perpetuity practically speaking. Political philosophy is related to politics because it must be concerned, as moral philosophy need not be, with practical political possibilities ... this concern with practical possibility compels political philosophy to consider fundamental institutional questions and assumptions of reasonable moral psychology” (*CP*, 447). This paragraph has many interesting features for anyone involved in the methodological disputes in political philosophy. Firstly, it suggests that the main difference between a politician and a political philosopher is the scale of time. Political philosophers ultimately have the same concerns as politicians, but their perspective is much longer than the standard democratic politician who is more concerned with their own electoral success/survival. Secondly, political philosophers, unlike moral philosophers, must be concerned with ‘practical political possibility’ (compared to the ‘limits’ of possibility, which is the term he uses in his later political work), which implies a much tighter connection between politics and political philosophy than (Late) Rawls ultimately would have been comfortable with.

Some Rawlsian scholars have been inspired by Early Political Rawls’s conception of stability. George Klosko’s work is the best example of this. Like Early Political Rawls, Klosko refers to the “fact of pluralism” without the ‘reasonable’ qualifier (Klosko, 2004, 4). He argues that he will focus on the question “how consensus can be obtained in contemporary liberal societies” (Klosko, 2004, 4). His method is to look at survey data of contemporary liberal societies which suggests that his justificatory community of justice consists of real citizens that exist in contemporary liberal societies.⁶⁰ Klosko recognises the difficulty of his project. He states “given the diversity of moral and religious views these societies contain, it is difficult to imagine how all citizens could agree on a single set of political principles. The differences in people’s views on numerous moral, religious, and philosophical issues make agreement on political issues an unlikely prospect ... the conditions indicated by pluralism and the lack of ready agreement confront liberal theory with a formidable challenge. Although general agreement is required, it is difficult to attain in modern societies. There is need for

⁶⁰ Because of the justificatory community were moralised or idealised in some way, survey data of real citizens in today’s world might not be as relevant.

principles that can be generally accepted in spite of widespread and severe disagreements” (Klosko, 2004, 5-6).

Jonathan Quong refers to political liberals who hold this view of stability as ‘external political liberals’. The reason for this is that the fact of pluralism (the fact that motivates normative theorising in a politically liberal way for external political liberalism) is a fact that is ‘external’ to liberal theory. The fact of pluralism is ‘external’ to political liberalism, and all forms of liberal theory need to deal with this external fact. The existence of pluralism leads to radical disagreement, and liberals need to find some way of managing this disagreement.

While Early Political Rawls’s conception of stability means that political liberalism is an extremely ambitious project, there are several reasons to believe that it was a project worth engaging in. Firstly, Early Political Rawls believed that there was historical evidence to suggest that his task was not an impossible task. He argued “even firmly held convictions gradually change: religious toleration is now accepted, and arguments for persecution are no longer openly professed; similarly slavery is rejected as inherently unjust, and however much the aftermath of slavery may persist in social practices and unavowed attitudes, no one is willing to defend it” (*CP*, 393). These ideas (and many more) were unthinkable and unrealistic ideals in the past. Today, defending slavery has become unthinkable. While it will most likely take a long time, it is not implausible to believe that the same can be said for more utopian ideals. The second reason is that, if successful, the project would be very practical. Klosko argues that “for both sociological and moral reasons, then, the development of agreement in society is a great good. But again, if we accept pluralism as a permanent feature of liberal societies, we face the challenge of presenting central political principles upon which diverse citizens can agree. In this work, I concentrate on a rather practical side of this subject; my concern is with liberal societies as they presently exist and the principles their diverse inhabitants could accept” (Klosko, 2004, 9). If Klosko is successful in generating what he refers to as a ‘liberal consensus’ from today’s beliefs, the prospect of achieving a political liberal utopia becomes much more realistic. Political liberalism becomes an acceptable solution to the current level of pluralism we see today.

6. 2 - The 'Moralist' Critique of Early Political Rawls

The transition between *A Theory of Justice* and Early Political Rawls's political turn of his theory of justice as fairness was controversial. Wenar describes this controversy quite well when he states that "many worried that Rawls's new-found concerns with stability and consensus had resulted, in the words of one critic, in a 'slighting of economic justice and the plight of the worst-off, which was central in *A Theory of Justice*'" (Wenar, 2004, 265). Bruce Ackerman argued that the "egalitarian commitment of *A Theory of Justice* does not survive the movement to *Political Liberalism* ... Rawls is wrong, then, to suppose his new commitment to political liberalism is compatible with his older commitments to the original position and equality" (Ackerman, 1994, 374-375). Finally, Joseph Raz interpreted Early Political Rawls's project in terms of Hobbesian stability. He argued that "The firm starting point [for Early Political Rawls] is the society of here and now, and every society sufficiently like it" (Raz, 1990, 6). He also asks the question "Has Rawls Become a Politician?" (Raz, 1990, 8). The main strain that unifies these critiques seems to be that Early Political Rawls's concern for consensus and stability undermines the validity and desirability of his normative claims. He is no longer as committed to the views about justice, liberalism, and equality he defended in *A Theory of Justice*, which came as a great shame for enthusiasts of those views. His desirable normative principles are sacrificed on the altar of political consensus. This is something that I discussed at the end of the previous chapter. It seems unlikely that someone can theorise about the most normatively desirable conception of justice with an ethic of responsibility.

Quong makes similar arguments against what he refers to as the 'external' conception of political liberalism. The 'external' conception responds to the 'fact of pluralism' and tries to generate principles that can achieve a moral consensus amongst real people. He starts by asking the question 'why should real people be given this degree of normative authority?' There are plenty of reasons to be sceptical of giving real people such a high degree of normative authority. Some people might be mistaken about empirical beliefs and want to use those empirical beliefs to impose rules of regulation against others (or advocate the removal of rules). A good example of this phenomenon might be climate change deniers, who argue for looser environmental regulations due to their scepticism of humanmade global warming. Some people might hold mistaken or unreasonable

normative beliefs. White supremacists who believe that their ethnicity means they are superior to people with other ethnicities, which grounds their belief that they do not need to reciprocate with members of other ethnicities about what justice demands, are a good example of this. If real citizens who hold these beliefs are included in the justificatory community of justice, it seems unlikely that there could be any consensus on even fundamental principles, such as the fact that all citizens should be treated with equal concern and respect. Any principle that does achieve a consensus will most likely not be liberal or very desirable.

6. 3 - The Political Realist Critique of Early Political Rawls

The political realist critique of Early Political Rawls's conception of stability should be relatively clear. Klosko tries to achieve a liberal consensus amongst real citizens who exist in today's liberal democratic societies. The early political realist literature believed that (Early Political Rawls's) political liberalism's reliance on consensus was impossible (Galston, 2010). Political realists believe that politics is about conflict and managing the disagreement that causes that conflict. This acts as a serious challenge to anyone who believes that an overlapping consensus is required for their political project. As Sleat argues "realism challenges liberalism by offering a vision of the political that undercuts the plausibility or appropriateness of thinking about politics in terms of consensus, agreement, or universal endorsement. The realist vision of politics challenges liberalism by conceptualising politics as an activity that takes place in conditions of ubiquitous, perennial, and ineradicable political disagreements and conflicts, including about the very fundamental terms of the political association itself, and hence accuses liberals of being too sanguine about the possibility of achieving either normative or practical consensus ... if we accept that persons will persistently and perennially have disagreements that go all the way down to their most fundamental normative moral and political commitments, leading them to endorse very different political frameworks, then theory cannot be orientated towards the search for reaching final agreements on political principles" (Sleat, 2013, 72).⁶¹ A political realist can accept that throughout

⁶¹ I think it is important to note that political realists believe their critique applies to both Early Political Rawls and Rawls. I will later show how I believe that the critique is only successful against Early Political Rawls.

history there have been significant changes in our fundamental convictions.⁶² However, political realists insist that the extent of pluralism is too great to allow a consensus on political arrangements that Early Political Rawls advocates. There is no chance of developing an overlapping consensus if we accept the fact of pluralism that exists in the real world.

It is important to note however that a political realist might be more sympathetic to Rawls's approach compared to other theories of justice available in the literature. For example, if a political realist was forced to choose between a perfectionist form of liberalism or political liberalism, it seems likely that (based on their understanding of stability and its importance) they would choose the political liberal option. As Galston argues "To be sure, Rawls is partly right: under conditions of pluralism, agreement on living well is not to be expected" (Galston, 2010, 391). However, Rawls does not take this understanding far enough. Galston continues by stating "But shifting focus from the good to the right doesn't help: agreement on justice is not to be expected either" (Galston, 2010, 391). Given the level of disagreement we see in the real world, the political realist would be sceptical of Rawls's claim that his political conception of justice was 'practically politically possible'.

6. 4 - Political Liberalism and Rawls on Stability

There are many problems with Early Political Rawls's political liberalism and its belief that the problem that political liberalism needed to solve is the problem of real-world pluralism and disagreement. From the moralist perspective, it seems like Early Political Rawls is 'too political'; the justification of his theory is not plausible. The desirability of his political conception of justice has been substantially reduced. From the political realist perspective, Early Political Rawls's goals are impossible, and therefore he fails his own standards. His work inevitably fails to achieve the required level of stability if we take current levels of pluralism seriously.

From 'The Domain of the Political and the Overlapping Consensus', Rawls starts to change what he means by stability and the aims of his political liberalism. Rawls rejects

⁶² Political realists use this fact to question the normativity of claims provided by political moralists in ideal theory. More on this when I discuss the Historicist Scepticism claim.

the ambitious/impossible project of Early Political Rawls. Instead, he pursues a more manageable project. Burton Dreben describes it best when he claims “what Rawls has primarily been doing is engage in a certain kind of very complex conceptual analysis, namely, he has been investigating the question, Is the notion of a constitutional liberal democracy internally consistent or coherent? Is it conceptually and logically possible to have as an ideal – it’s not even a question of how to bring it about” (Dreben, 2006, 322).⁶³

Rawls still “views political philosophy as realistically utopian” (Rawls, 2007, 11). However, his discussion of practicality and feasibility becomes more nuanced. He still wants to engage with what he considers to be politically possible, but he now believes that one of the roles of political philosophy is “*probing the limits of practicable political possibility* ... Our hope for the future of our society rests on the belief that the social world allows at least a decent political order, so that reasonably just, though not perfect, democratic regime is possible” (Rawls, 2007, 10-11, emphasis mine).

Rawls’s conception of ‘reasonable’ pluralism provides a specific way in which Rawls is now engaging in probing the limits of practical political possibility. Rawls argues “this fact of reasonable pluralism must be distinguished from the fact of pluralism as such. It is the fact that free institutions tend to generate not simply a variety of doctrines and views ... rather, it is the fact that among the views that develop are a diversity of reasonable comprehensive doctrines. These are doctrines that reasonable citizens affirm and that political liberalism must address ... they are part the work of free practical reason within the framework of free institutions ... In framing the political conception so that it can, at the second stage, gain the support of reasonable comprehensive doctrines, we are not so much adjusting that conception to brute forces of the world but to the inevitable outcome of free human reason” (PL, 36-37). The pluralism and disagreement that political liberalism must engage with does not refer to the real level of disagreement we see in the world today. The comprehensive doctrines that exist in

⁶³ Of course, it is a bit of an exaggeration to say that Rawls is only engaging in conceptual analysis and whether political liberalism is conceptually and logically possible. We should also be interested in whether that ideal is a desirable ideal. However, as I will explain later, the type of conceptual analysis Rawls is interested in is whether political liberalism is coherent with the fact that free institutions generate a diversity of reasonable comprehensive doctrines. In a sense, what it is asking is whether political liberalism can cope with the conditions that political liberalism will itself create.

today's world are not directly relevant. At one point, Rawls explicitly states "we leave aside comprehensive doctrines that now exist, or that have existed, or that might exist" (*PL*, 40).

If Rawls isn't engaging with real disagreement, what is the problem that Rawls is trying to solve? The question 'Is liberal democracy internally coherent?' can sound quite vague. We know that according to our liberal democratic political culture, in an ideal world, we will live under free institutions. When citizens of the ideal world use their reason, due to the burdens of judgment, they will reach different reasonable conclusions about how to flourish (and other intractable philosophical questions).⁶⁴ Is it possible for Rawls to find a political conception of justice that could gain the allegiance of these reasonable citizens who hold these reasonable comprehensive doctrines that inevitably emerge when living under free institutions? If the answer is no, Rawls's conception of liberal democracy (and possibly all forms of liberal constitutional democracy) becomes internally incoherent and therefore not an ideal that we should strive towards in our pursuit of justice (or we might have to accept that the fact of oppression is unavoidable).⁶⁵ If the answer is yes, Rawls's theory 'probes the limits of practicable political possibility' and therefore gives us 'reasonable faith' that it can be achieved in the real world; it is realistically utopian. Dreben explains "Thus Rawls is engaged in what he calls 'ideal theory': not a theory about nonconflict, but an ideal theory of conflict. In ideal theory you start out with the idea that the reasonable citizen recognizes that his reasonable comprehensive doctrine is probably in irreconcilable conflict with other reasonable citizens' irreconcilable and conflicting reasonable comprehensive doctrines. Then you want to work out whether there can be a coherent conception of a constitutional liberal democratic society, and what are the necessary conditions for such a society" (Dreben, 2006, 323).

⁶⁴ It is for this reason that Quong refers to this conception of political liberalism as the 'internal conception of political liberalism'. The fact of pluralism is no longer the important fact that political liberals need to engage with. It is instead the fact of 'reasonable' pluralism. 'Reasonable' pluralism is not a brute fact of the world. Instead it is 'internal' to liberalism as it is the inevitable product of using human reason under free liberal institutions.

⁶⁵ Rawls refers to the fact that the "continuing shared understanding on one comprehensive religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine can be maintained only by the oppressive use of state power" as the 'fact of oppression'. (*PL*, 37)

Who is part of the justificatory community of Rawls's work? As Quong argues, political liberalism "does not aim to achieve public justification or normative stability in current liberal democratic societies – its aim is instead to work out the content and structure of liberal political justification given the fact that *reasonable pluralism will characterise any well-ordered society*. We know that in a well-ordered liberal society there will be (a) a plurality of conflicting conceptions of the good, and we also stipulate, since we are working in the realm of ideal theory; (b) that citizens will want to propose and abide by fair terms provided others will do the same. Thus, the constituency of reasonable persons is an idealisation: a hypothetical group of citizens who accept (a), and have the motivation described in (b) ... The idea of the reasonable citizen is thus constructed from a conception of an ideal liberal society, and not from empirical facts about actual citizens" (Quong, 2011, 143-144).

Some political theorists might be disappointed with this approach to political liberalism and the conception of Rawlsian stability it holds. Political liberalism no longer sounds like an ambitious political project. It no longer sounds like a directly practical project at all. At times, the fact that we are only talking to idealised reasonable citizens means that the difficult problems raised by politics (what makes the pursuit of justice so difficult) is absent. The ideal theory of conflict does not sound like a theory of conflict at all.

However, once we recognise the aims of political liberalism and Rawlsian stability, the virtues of the project become much clearer. Firstly, it is not an impossible task. As mentioned before, Early Political Rawls's work was too ambitious. It would inevitably fail either the goal of desirable and justifiable normativity or the goal of practical politics (or both). Rawls does not try to provide an 'Archimedean Point' from which everyone, both liberals and non-liberals, and both reasonable and unreasonable people, should be convinced by and accept liberal principles of justice. As Dreben argues "Rawls is a good enough thinker not to argue against those who do not believe in liberal constitutional democracy" (Dreben, 2006, 323). To achieve Rawlsian stability might be a more modest project, but it is a feasible one. It avoids all the main challenges that made Early Political Rawls's work impossible.

Rawls's work avoids being 'political in the wrong way'. Reliance on real citizens and the 'fact of pluralism' opened Early Political Rawls's work to a lot of problems. Some real citizens might hold unreasonable moral views or be mistaken about empirical beliefs.

They might not believe in the fundamental ideas that Rawls draws from the public political culture of a liberal democratic society, such as the “idea of society as a fair system of cooperation” (*PL*, 15). It also does not rely on unreliable survey data of real people; opinions that could easily change. It is important to note that Rawls does not use the term ‘political’ in the same way that political realists use the term ‘political’.

The ‘modesty’ of the work (relative to Early Political Rawls’s work) makes it much more difficult to show how Rawls’s work is problematic. Political realists cannot use the argument that the real world of disagreement is too great and therefore an overlapping consensus is impossible. Based on the aims of political liberalism and the method it uses to reach its conclusions, this argument is irrelevant. Real citizens and real disagreement never enter the equation. A few of the main challenges to Rawls’s work from non-political realists follow a similar line, which means that the same thing can be said about their critiques. Both Gerald Gaus and Kevin Vallier have argued that Quong’s political liberalism (and therefore Rawls’s political liberalism) is ‘excessively sectarian’.⁶⁶ The argument goes like this. All political liberals might agree that perfectionism is problematic because it is sectarian. As Gaus argues “Illiberal sectarianism is so objectionable because, though there is foundational disagreement concerning β within P, S nevertheless claims that R regulates all of P, and is willing to enforce R on all of P. Those members of P who are not members of the sect S cannot accept R as justified. Regulation R is not part of a basic framework of political life those outside the sect can endorse” (Gaus, 2012, 8-9). However, Quong limits the justificatory community of political liberalism to “citizens *already committed* to certain basic liberal norms” (Quong, 2011, 5). Because this is a particularly restrictive community, particularly relative to the real level of pluralism we see in the world, Gaus argues that “Quong’s political liberalism is not an opponent of sectarianism, but of perfectionist sectarianism, willing to replace it with a Rawlsian sectarianism. Isn’t the Church of Perfection simply replaced with that of High Rawlsianism?” (Gaus, 2012, 9). Vallier argues that “Coercing citizens without a

⁶⁶ I believe that Quong provides the best interpretation of Rawls’s work and therefore if a criticism is directed at Quong’s work, it is also directed at Rawls’s work. For the sake of simplicity, I will only talk about Quong’s work in this paragraph, but I think the critique (and Quong’s response) also applies to Rawls’s work. Quong might be more explicitly sectarian as he places the overlapping consensus before the construction of justice rather than after. However, because Rawls is theorising about the internal coherence of a liberal democratic society, I think the result is ultimately very similar; too similar for me to differentiate between the two when discussing the charge of sectarianism.

public justification if they hold non-liberal comprehensive views is no different from the sectarian perfectionist view that people can be coerced without a public justification if they hold false comprehensive views” (Vallier, 2017, 175).

I think this debate in the public reason/political liberalism literature can be misleading. To a certain extent, I think Gaus and Vallier are making a similar mistake to the one that political realists are making against Rawls. Rawls might accept that his conception of political liberalism and its goal of Rawlsian stability is sectarian. Quong and Larmore (both advocates of Rawlsian political liberalism) explicitly accept that their conceptions of political liberalism are sectarian (Quong 2012, and Larmore, 2015). The problem is whether that sectarianism is unjustifiable and therefore problematic, especially since Gaus admits “in one sense *any* set of moral or political principles will be sectarian in relation to *some* part of the population” (Gaus, 2012, 9). I think Quong’s theory is sectarian but ultimately it is ‘sectarian for the right reasons’. As Quong argues “psychopaths will not endorse any moral principles, Nazis or other racists will not endorse the value of equality, and so on. Should liberals be troubled by the fact that our conceptions of justice are sectarian with regard to these groups? The answer is clearly no” (Quong, 2012, 53). Being sectarian against these groups is justifiable as they are not entitled to be part of the justificatory community of justice if they are not willing to offer fair terms of cooperation and treat people with basic respect. Regarding how political liberalism is different from unjustifiable perfectionist sectarianism, Quong argues that “the latter, but not the former, is sectarian with regard to some *reasonable* members of the political community. All reasonable people will endorse the political ideas of freedom, equality, and fairness, and will be willing to comply with the requirements of public reason and a political conception of justice, but any particular claims about human flourishing or the good life will be rejected by some reasonable persons.” (Quong, 2012, 53-54). To show that Quong’s political liberalism is unjustifiably sectarian, someone would have to show how his work is sectarian in this objectionable sense, “that it fails to be justifiable to some people whom we should identify as reasonable, and thus people to whom our political principles ought to be justifiable” (Quong, 2012, 54).

Being too ‘sectarian’ even for the right reasons can make it more difficult to gain the support of people in the real world. Everyone might accept that Nazi’s and

unreasonable people should be excluded. However, Gaus argues that there are plenty of ‘nice’ people in the world who are also excluded from the justificatory community of Quong’s political liberalism. Imagine Susan is a religious citizen who endorses all the main liberal values and is willing to accept and propose fair terms of cooperation. However, she does not “accord any deliberative priority to the political conception of justice” (Quong, 2012, 55). Instead, she consults both the political conception of justice and her comprehensive doctrine (or non-public beliefs) when deciding what rules are justified. It seems like Quong’s account would argue that Susan is an unreasonable individual and should be excluded from the justificatory constituency. This might seem problematic. As Gaus argues, people like Susan are “good willed, wish to live with others on mutually acceptable terms, and concur that the argument from the original position gives [her] *pro tanto* reasons” (Gaus, 2012, 12). Quong’s political liberalism seems to exclude these well-mannered ‘nice’ people, which might seem a step too far morally speaking, especially if what is valuable about political liberalism is its commitment to public justification. Politically speaking, it can have negative consequences. Most people could easily label a Nazi as someone who is unreasonable and find nothing problematic about this labelling. They would also most likely find nothing problematic about excluding the Nazi from the justificatory community. However, to refer to Susan, someone who has no intention of being violent or rejecting the fact that all citizens are free and equal, as unreasonable (and therefore exclude her) might lead to a backlash regarding supporting the political programme of political liberalism. Some people might believe that between the choice of believing that they themselves are unreasonable and rejecting the political program of political liberalism, it would be a more attractive option to reject the program. At one point in the 2016 Presidential Election, Hillary Clinton referred to half of Trump supporters as a ‘basket of deplorables’. This moment was used quite effectively by those in the Trump campaign to show her ‘contempt’ for millions of Americans. Influential individuals in the Trump Campaign, such as Roger Stone, used the term as a badge of honour (Jacobs, 2016). It is difficult to tell how much impact the claim had on swaying the electorate.

However, it is clearly difficult to get people on your side in politics and democracy when you insult them.⁶⁷

There are good strategic reasons not to exclude people from the justificatory community. To respond to this charge of excessive exclusion, Quong needs good moral reasons to exclude ‘nice’ people like Susan from the justificatory community. Quong excludes them because he believes that there is no way to include these individuals and still “guarantee that the content of the theory will remain suitably *liberal*” (Quong, 2012, 55). He uses the example of religious discrimination in hiring employees in non-religious contexts. Political liberals argue that discriminating for employment (except for religious associations) is unjustifiable, and that is what any plausible balance among the core political values of freedom, equality, and fairness will argue (Quong, 2012). However, someone like Susan might accept that the political conception of justice will argue that religious discrimination is unjustifiable, but she ultimately believes that all things considered (including her religious views), the right against religious discrimination is not justified. From this one example, we can see how a ‘nice’ individual can easily reach an illiberal conclusion. This means that political liberals either must be inclusive of these ‘nice’ individuals and give up the guarantee that the result will be liberal, or they should accept that, morally speaking, there are good reasons to believe that we should try and guarantee the basic rights and entitlements of individuals, and therefore these ‘nice’ individuals should be excluded from the justificatory community.

For reasons stated in previous paragraphs, this sounds quite difficult to sell in the arena of politics. However, the aim of achieving (or practically implementing) political liberalism is a secondary goal. Instead, what they are trying to do is to provide a coherent and normatively desirable theory of justice and liberal democracy. Quong concludes his response to Gaus by arguing that he “[doesn’t] think there’s a coherent and morally attractive alternative to my, admittedly, sectarian form of political liberalism. We can have a theory of [political liberalism] that won’t be sectarian, but then we can’t be sure it will be a liberal theory. Insofar as the [political liberal] project is a distinctively liberal project, a certain amount of sectarianism is both unavoidable and, indeed, desirable”

⁶⁷ Calling someone unreasonable is not as bad as calling someone deplorable. However, the point is that excluding ‘nice’ people from the justificatory community can be good for the desirability of a conception of justice but can make it difficult to achieve as a political programme.

(Quong, 2012, 55). This sentence clearly shows Quong's priority. He is interested in developing the most coherent and normatively desirable theory of justice and liberal democracy. This desirability is what makes it so difficult to implement (in our world for the foreseeable future). The scope of reasonable people is quite limited and would exclude many people in today's world. This sectarianism would make political liberalism impossible if it was a political project of a contemporary politician.

Rawls is not trying to provide a completely 'useless' political theory. He explicitly believes that political philosophy should be realistically utopian. If it could be shown that there were several meaningful constraints in human nature that prevented us from achieving a politically liberal world, I believe Rawls would find this evidence to be problematic for his political liberalism. However, he is more focused on the project of developing an internally coherent and morally attractive conception of justice. Constructing the most normatively desirable conception of justice takes priority for Rawls over the direct political practicality of his project. Because of this, Rawls does not fail to meet his own standards. He has dropped the circumstances of political justice and is only concerned with the circumstances of justice. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Rawls is asking a different question than the one that political realists are interested in.

6.5 – Conclusion

Last chapter, I discussed how there are many questions that political theorists can ask. I made a distinction between theorising about politics and theorising about justice and showed how a lot of political moralists were interested in the question of justice. However, this was a simplification. There are theorists that, at least initially, blend these tasks. Rawls's theory is too expansive to be neatly packaged into a single question/task. In a lot of ways, Rawls's political theory can be frustrating for political realists and moralists alike, due to this difficulty.

In this chapter, I discussed a critique that political realists could make against Rawls. The previous chapter discussed the problematic nature of trying to undermine a theory based on external standards set by political realists. This chapter discussed a critique that suggested that Rawls failed by his own standards, which, if true, would be problematic for Rawls and Rawlsians, even if political theory is a very diverse field.

Political realists might argue that the moment someone invokes stability as a desideratum of their theory of justice, they will inevitably fail to meet their own standards. The only way to successfully ensure that a theory will be stable is by theorising about politics with an ethic of responsibility.

I started off by showing how there was a version of Rawls where this critique applied. Some of Rawls's earlier work in his transition from *A Theory of Justice* to *Political Liberalism* was quite controversial. There was a sense in which theorists such as Ackerman, Barry, and Raz found Rawls's transition problematic because it seemed to sacrifice too much moral desirability for political practicality. Rawls himself seemed to suggest that his conception of the problem of stability was very similar to the way that political realists see the problem of stability. If this is true, it seems likely that Rawls's project is too ambitious. Political realists would be correct that Rawls's project would fail. Political moralists would also agree with this assessment.

However, I ended this chapter by showing how soon after these early texts, Rawls's *Political Liberalism* is much more modest than political realists assume. Political realists are trying to manage the disagreement they see in the real world. Rawls's political liberalism is trying to coherently manage the disagreement that would emerge amongst reasonable people in ideal free conditions (coherent with its own moral standards). This modesty might make it much less interesting for political realists. They might apply the same critiques they made in Chapter 3 and 4 to this interpretation of Rawls, namely that it seems useless for real-world political agents who have to engage with radical disagreement. However, this modest project is actually manageable. Rawls is trying to develop an internally coherent and morally attractive conception of justice. And because of this, the arguments I made in the previous chapter apply to Rawls's *Political Liberalism*. He is trying to ask a different question, and political realists cannot argue that Rawls's *Political Liberalism* fails because it fails to meet their standards of stability.

Chapter 7 – Historicist Scepticism and Political Realism

Every previous chapter of this thesis has been dedicated to analysing the relationship between politics and political philosophy. This focus was intentional. It was a response to the (re)emergence of political realism. William Galston's article on *Realism in Political Theory* focused predominantly on how political realists are united by their belief that contemporary political philosophy had a "desire to evade, displace, or escape from politics" (Galston, 2010, 385-386). Political realists today continue to claim that "a useful but not wholly satisfactory slogan for realist theory ... has been that it wishes to restore or reassert the 'autonomy of politics,' the spirit of which should probably best be interpreted as insisting that we ought to develop ways of thinking about politics better suited to the nature of the political itself" (Sleat, 2018, 6). In response to political realists, this thesis has made several claims. The first is that the idea of a 'normativity internal to politics' is unlikely to succeed, at least if political realists want to insist that the normativity internal to politics cannot or should not be evaluated from an external perspective, particularly from a moral one. The second is that political realists are advocating an 'ethic of responsibility', which I believe is an analytically precise account of what political realists are arguing for. I also argued that there was a limit to which an ethic of responsibility could be used as a critique against the theories of normative political philosophers, because it is unclear if anyone would actually reject it. Even if moralists' theories of justice are not perfect embodiments of the ethic, this does not mean they reject it. Finally, I argued that political realists insist that every normative political philosopher is trying to 'theorise about politics' and doing so in a way that does not resemble politics at all. However, it is not entirely clear that this is in fact what everyone is doing. For example, Rawls seems much more interested in the question of what the most reasonable conception of justice is to regulate the basic structure of society is. The answer to the question 'what is justice?' has important political implications. However, it is not the same as the answer to the question 'what should we do under circumstances of radical disagreement, where people will not only disagree about the good but about justice as well?' These arguments have several implications for the debate between political realists and moralists. They suggest that either the disagreement between the two is exaggerated because rather than disagreeing about the answer to the same question, they are in fact engaging with separate questions. Or they suggest that if there is a significant disagreement between the two, the political realist

has the more implausible case, such as the attempt to delineate a normativity internal to politics that somehow invalidates attempts to evaluate it from an external moral perspective.

However, I do not believe that the only aim that political realists have is to ‘recover’ politics, if by recovering politics we mean bringing back radical disagreement as some form of constraint on our normative theorising. While this is a very important element of what political realists are advocating, particularly those who are still writing from a political realist perspective, it cannot be the whole picture. I have alluded to what was missing from previous chapters by referring to what I call the ‘Historicist Scepticism’ claim. It is this claim that will be the focus of this chapter.

Political realists consistently make (or rely on) metaethical and metaphysical arguments in order to make their case that “political philosophy must be realist” (Geuss, 2008, 9). For example, political realists will regularly cite Geuss’s claim that “Ethics is usually dead politics: the hand of a victor in some past conflict reaching out to try to extend its grip to the present and the future” (Geuss, 2009, 42).⁶⁸ While this quote has the word politics in it, it seems much more like a claim about how we should consider the status of our ethical claims. A similar idea can be found in recent work on political realism, which argues that “politics cannot be ‘applied ethics’ because our moral frameworks and discourses have a history, at least part of which is going to be political. And so morality does not ground politics because morality is itself partly the result of past politics and political battles. And so any form of realism must likely reject the possibility of moral reasoning as fully autonomous in ways that we might usually associate with Platonic and Kantian traditions.” (Sleat, 2018, 17). Finally, I do not find it surprising that the two main (original) advocates of political realism are Bernard Williams and Raymond Geuss. Both theorists are not necessarily sceptics of morality and normativity in general. However, both have consistently written throughout their careers on issues about the limits of philosophy, particularly on the timelessness of our moral and political convictions. The worry seems to be that if I accept the authority of some normative or moral claims made to me, am I “doing more than accepting the local prejudice of my time and society?” (Geuss, 2014, xiv).

⁶⁸ For political realists who cite this claim, see Jubb and Rossi, 2015; Rossi and Sleat; 2014;

This chapter aims to develop the metaethical and metaphysical views that political realists implicitly or explicitly make or rely on. Providing a comprehensive view of all the metaethical views held by each individual political realist will be an impossible task within the span of a thesis, let alone a chapter. As mentioned before, even William Galston initially referred to the diverse group of theorists associated with political realism as “a ragtag band” who contribute to a “community stew where everyone throws something different into the pot” (Galston, 2010, 385-386). However, I do believe that there is one claim that is shared by most (if not all) political realists, namely the Historicist Scepticism claim. This holds that our moral and ethical convictions are the by-product of historical accidents, which means they could have been very different had our history been different. Because of this, we should be sceptical that our moral and ethical convictions represent universal moral truths or that we will be able to find a rational basis for moral and ethical convictions that somehow transcends our historical context.

The first section of this chapter will discuss how someone would justify the Historicist Scepticism claim. The second section will discuss a Rawlsian strategy of avoidance that allows him to be a moralist but rely on the resources within the historical context of modern liberal democratic societies. The third section will provide an error theory for liberal universalism, which is something that political realists do not believe is possible. Finally, the last section will attempt to reject the sceptical implications of the Historicist Scepticism claim. While there are many positive and negative metaethical arguments I make in the last section, the main theme that unites them is that political realists are trying to undermine a moral justification and reason with an explanation of how we obtained our moral convictions. The best a story of how we obtained our moral convictions can do is to make us a little embarrassed. However, it ultimately is a separate question whether a moralist has provided a good moral justification for their argument.

7. 1 – The Metaethical and Metaphysical Claims of Political Realists

There are several reasons why someone would endorse the Historicist Scepticism claim. We can start with what we can call *the problem of modernity*. Williams claims that modernity is “a genuinely historical category” (IBWD, 42). When we think about legitimization stories for political authorities in today’s world, they are “essentially connected with the

nature of modernity as the social thought of the past century, particularly that of Weber, has helped us to understand it. This includes organisational features (pluralism, etc., and bureaucratic forms of control), individualism, and cognitive aspects of authority (*Entzauberung*).” (IBWD, 9). Associated with modernity are “the decline of traditional patterns of authority, and by secularisation” (IBWD, 42). Due to this secularisation, Williams believes that “we can no longer expect religion to provide ultimate explanations of nature or ultimate justifications of morality” (Larmore, 1996, 43).⁶⁹ However, considering how throughout our history, religious foundations played a foundational role in our ethical beliefs, we are now faced with the problem of finding a replacement for a foundation of ethics. In other words, “what authority can moral demands have to govern our conduct once we have given up the perspective in which they are seen as the commandments of a superior being?” (Larmore, 1996, 44). Compared to morality, modern natural science “has learned how to proceed according to internal criteria that can in principle be satisfied on the basis of experimental evidence that must itself conform to scientific standards” (Larmore, 1996, 45). Given this (relatively) smooth transition for science, our culture is ‘scientistic’ in the sense that there are many who believe that “scientific knowledge is the only knowledge we possess” (Larmore, 1987, 29). People who hold the scientistic view of the world believe we need an account of the foundations of morality that is consistent with science. Blackburn sets up the problem clearly as “finding room for ethics, or placing ethics within the disenchanted, non-ethical order which we inhabit, and of which we are a part” (Blackburn, 1998, 49). Sagar argues that “there are no ultimate – we might say, metaphysical – supports of what we value ... no point of view of the universe, no God, no natural teleology, no transcendental Kantian rationality, guaranteeing what we do is ultimately right, good, correct, or otherwise” (Sagar, 2014, 368).⁷⁰

⁶⁹ I find this claim slightly confusing. It cannot literally be true that we no longer accept religious foundations for our moral and ethical beliefs, if by ‘we’, we mean citizens of modern liberal democratic societies. There are many religious people in those societies that believe that religion plays a foundational role. The religious right in America could easily accept (and in fact demand) a legitimisation story of political authority that is based on their religious traditions. There is also good empirical evidence to suggest that the belief that ‘the more modern we become the more secular we become’ is not true, or at least is very unique to the European experience (Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 2010). Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any more explanation and justification of what this means in the political realist literature. However, my aim in this chapter is more ambitious than questioning the logic of very specific claims made by political realists, and for this reason I will take this assertion for granted.

⁷⁰ At times, political realists seem to be making claims that are similar to the metaphysical queerness argument that Mackie made in his book *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. The Queerness Argument states

Geuss and Williams are sceptical that we can find a replacement for the foundation of morality and ethics. They believe it is impossible to offer “an external justification for our ethical” lives (Hall, 2014, 549). Because of this, we have to accept that we live in a morally inert world. According to Williams, there is no Archimedean point from which we can provide an objective foundation for ethical life.⁷¹ He famously discusses three strategies to provide an ultimate justification for our ethical beliefs. He rejects the human nature based practical reason account favoured by Aristotle, not only because it relies on suspicious teleology, but also because he believes that relying on human nature will “radically underdetermine the ethical options even in a given social situation” (*ELP*, 153). He states that “any ethical life is going to contain restraints on such things as killing, injury, and lying, but those restraints can take very different forms” (*ELP*, 153). He also argues that even though we know that all human beings need to share a social world, the question that he believes cannot be answered in a very satisfactory way by relying on human nature is “is there anything to be known about their needs and their basic motivations that will show us what this world would best be?” (*ELP*, 153). Williams rejects the form of “minimal and most abstract possible conception of rational agency” provided by Kant, because he believes that “practical deliberation is in every case first-personal ... The *I* of the reflective practical deliberation is not required to take the result of anyone else’s properly conducted deliberation as datum, nor be committed from the outset to a harmony of everyone’s deliberations – that is to say, to making a rule from a standpoint of equality.” (*ELP*, 69). Finally, Williams questions whether it would be possible for philosophers to generate “convergence on a body of ethical truths which is brought about and explained by the fact that they are truths” in a similar way

that “[moral] realists are committed to the existence of a *sui generis* entity: a fact or property that had the power, necessarily, to supply both a categorical reason for action for everyone, and the motivation to pursue such action to anyone who rightly appreciated it” (Shafer-Landau, 2003, 82). Political realists tend to fall short of making it explicitly, so I don’t really discuss it in detail here. However, even in very recent writings by political realists seem to suggest that they find the metaphysics of objective morality quite strange. For example, Freedman tells a story where he asked the late Ronald Dworkin “about the historical and geographical sources of his ostensibly universal liberal philosophy”, and he was frustrated to hear Dworkin respond by stating “you say ideas don’t float in an abstract world. When my son was very young, he would tolerate me to ask him questions such as ‘Where do numbers live?’ And he got very tired of this, and he said one day, ‘I know where numbers live – they live in beer cans in the Himalayan mountains.’ And that’s where ideas live, too” (Freedman, 2018, 348-349). Of course, given the views of the rest of this chapter, it should be clear that I find the Queerness Argument implausible.

⁷¹ Williams defines an Archimedean point for knowledge as “some position outside all our knowledge and belief from which we could validate them” (*ELP*, 28). Presumably this would mean that for the ethical case, the task of finding an Archimedean point would be to find some position outside our ethical dispositions and belief from which we could validate them, which Williams believes can only be found “in the idea of rational action” (*ELP*, 28).

that we converge on scientific truths (*ELP*, 151-152). He believes that some convergence is possible and the beliefs we converge on can be referred to as ‘ethical knowledge’. This can happen for particular communities and their use of thick ethical concepts.⁷² We all need to live in a social world, and particular social worlds will inevitably converge on thick ethical concepts. However, history shows us that “there is no such social world in which people need to live. They certainly do not need to live in a world that sustains the concept of chastity” (*ELP*, 217). This means that “showing why one local concept rather than others was ethically appropriate in particular circumstances ... could not do something that explanations of perception can do, which is to generate an adequate theory of error and to account generally for the tendency of people to have what, according to its principles, are wrong beliefs” (*ELP*, 151).⁷³ We can refer to this as the *No Archimedean Point claim*.

The No Archimedean Point claim has several implications for the status of our moral and ethical beliefs. We all live in social worlds and engage in social practices that have shared understandings of thick ethical concepts and norms that we find authoritative. We also know that our moral and ethical beliefs have a historical story behind them. The fact that our ethical beliefs have a history is not necessarily problematic in any way; no one would find the fact that our scientific discoveries have a history is a reason to debunk our beliefs in gravity somehow. As mentioned before, Williams is willing to refer to these beliefs that we converge upon as ethical knowledge. However, political realists believe that the lack of an Archimedean point of our moral and ethical beliefs and the fact that they are the result of a particular history has an unsettling effect on them. There have been many different social worlds with different ethical and moral beliefs that have existed throughout history. How do we know for sure that liberal values are true? One effect of learning about the “causal story” of our beliefs is “to loosen the hold of our inherited values upon our emotional allegiances. Haunted by a sense of lost possibilities, historians are almost inevitably Laodicean [indifferent] in their attachment to the values of the present time ... we become disturbingly aware of the

⁷² For an analysis of thick concepts see chapter 2 and the discussion of politics as a thick concept.

⁷³ There is a wide literature on whether his accounts of Aristotle and Kant are accurate and how Aristotelean and Kantian accounts could respond to Williams’s reasons for rejecting them. The same can be said about Williams’s infamous claim that ‘reflection can destroy knowledge’ (*ELP*, 158). However, as I will explain later, one of the main goals of this chapter is to reject the case for looking for an Archimedean point for our moral and ethical beliefs in the first place. Because of this, this debate is outside the scope of my thesis.

sheer contingency of the process by which our values were formed” (Skinner, 1994, 554-555). In other words, can we believe that our moral and ethical beliefs are true and accept their authority over us (and others) if they were the outcome of some historical accidents, and could easily have been very different had these accidents gone another way? Can we believe in the authority of our ethical conceptions if “the historical changes that brought them about are not obviously related to them in any way that vindicates them against possible rivals”? (Williams, 2002, 20-21). We can refer to this as *the problem of historical diversity* or *the problem of historical accident*.

It is important to note that it is not only political realists who believe that the problem of historical accident is a problem for our moral and ethical beliefs. G. A. Cohen describes a thought experiment of how he would feel if he were to discover that he had “an identical twin, who was raised not in a communist home but in a politically middle-of-the-road home” and that twin “has the easy tolerance toward limited inequality” which he did not have due to his upbringing in a communist home (Cohen, 2000, 8). He believed that that would have an unsettling effect on his own “uncompromising egalitarianism” and importantly not because the twin “could supply [him] with an argument against egalitarianism of which [he] was previously unaware of” (Cohen, 2000, 8). He believes that “it should give us pause that we would not have beliefs that are central to our lives ... if we had not been brought up as we in fact were” because “if we are reflective and honest ... [in many cases] *we consequently do not believe as we do because our grounds for our beliefs are superior to those which others have for their rival beliefs.*” (Cohen, 2000, 9).⁷⁴

An Archimedean point for our justifications would show someone from the *ancien regime* in the 1700’s that there has been an improvement regarding our moral and ethical standards. In Williams’s terms, our moral and ethical beliefs would be ‘vindicated’ because “the later theory, or (more generally) outlook, makes sense of itself, and of the earlier outlook, and of the transition from the earlier to the later, in such terms that both parties (the holders of the earlier outlook, and the holders of the later) have reason to

⁷⁴ Cohen’s point is slightly different in the sense that Williams and Geuss’s arguments rely on the idea of historical diversity whilst Cohen’s analysis of the problem is limited to upbringing. However, there are more similarities than differences. We believe a lot of things not because we have arguments that refute other beliefs. We believe them because of our historical context/upbringing. Is this a good basis for us to have confidence in our beliefs?

recognise the transition as an improvement” (*PHD*, 189). However, there is no Archimedean point. So if Louis XIV is ‘looking over our shoulder’ when we engaging in moral reason, should he recognise our conclusions? Williams argues that

“If liberalism is correct and is universal ... people of earlier times had ideas which were simply in the light of reason worse than ours, why did they not have better ideas? Kant had an answer, in terms of a theory of enlightenment. Hegel and Marx had other and less schematic answers. All of them accepted a progressive view of history ... I would say that such theorists lack a ‘theory of error’ for what they call correctness in moral thought: unlike the situation with the sciences ... there is in the moral case no story about the subject matter and about these past people’s situation which explains why those people got it wrong about that subject matter.” (*IBWD*, 66)

We no longer find it fashionable to hold a progressive view of history, especially because of the problem of modernity; it clashes with our scientific view of the world. We should also find an argument about the foundations of morality that depended on a progressive view of history as problematic because it suggests that liberals are “being cheered on by the universe” (*PHD*, 144). Without an Archimedean point for us to justify our beliefs to others and ourselves, it seems too convenient to look from our perspective to other moral standards that have existed throughout history and regard them as “bad, or stupid, or something on these lines” (*IBWD*, 67).

Geuss and Williams believe that the problem of modernity, along with the no Archimedean point claim and the problem of historical diversity/accident, force us to look at the world realistically (without wishful thinking) and acknowledge the bitter truth that we live in a morally inert world. We need to avoid the ‘optimism’ associated with what Geuss referred to as ‘traditional philosophy’ and accept that “there is no pre-existing ‘meaning’ in the world, only what we humans can construct by our weak powers and flawed efforts” (Geuss, 2008, 225). The world cannot “be made cognitively accessible to us without remainder”, and it was not set up in a way that it has “*some* orientation toward the satisfaction of some basic, rational, human desires or interests” (Geuss, 2005, 223). Instead, it is “sheerly indifferent to or perversely frustrating of human happiness” (Geuss, 2005, 223). Williams has a similar level of pessimism when he states that “we know that the world was not made for us, or we for the world, that

our history tells us no purposive story, and that there is no position outside the world or outside history from which we might hope to authenticate our activities.” (Williams, 1993, 166).

Of course, political realists are not moral nihilists. Nor is Williams a ‘scientistic reductionist’ in the sense that all forms of knowledge have to be reduced to science. He explicitly rejected the idea that we should “assimilate philosophy to the aims, or at least the manners, of the sciences” (*PHD*, 182). Hall argues that

“Williams is adamant that it would be a mistake to think that this [the belief in the world as morally inert] inexorably leads to nihilism or practical paralysis. While philosophical inquiry cannot ‘control the enemies of the community or its shirkers,’ it can ‘by giving reason to people already disposed to hear it ... help in continually creating a community held together by that same disposition’. Nor must we remain in ‘unreflective prejudice,’ because we can, and should, engage in practices of reflection that seek ‘understanding of our motives, [and] psychological or social insight into our ethical practices,’ and this is not merely an explanatory activity, because it can critically reveal that ‘certain practices or sentiments are not what they are taken to be’” (Hall, 2014, 549).

What we can do is have ‘confidence’ in our ethical convictions by showing how “a given practice hangs together with other practices in a way that makes social and psychological sense” (*ELP*, 126). Williams, to a certain extent, tries to do this with the concept of Truth. In his book *Truth and Truthfulness*, he tries to provide what he refers to as a ‘vindicatory genealogy’, by providing a genealogical story that gives “a decent pedigree to truth and truthfulness” (Williams, 2003, 19).⁷⁵ However, we have to admit the important Wittgensteinian truth that ‘In the Beginning was the Deed’. We can (at least partially) justify our own ethical beliefs to ourselves because we can understand them and understand that “this is what we do” (McGinn, 1989, 134). Certain ideas such as the belief that every citizen or human being deserves equal consideration “stand fast” for us liberals, in the sense that they are ‘*unhintergebbbar*’: there is nothing more basic in

⁷⁵ There is a lot of literature on what we might refer to as Williams’s positive account of ethics. However, the main aim of my chapter is to reject Williams’s negative account of ethics, which is why providing an account of the literature on how one can engage in a vindicatory genealogy of our moral and political concepts is outside the scope of this thesis.

terms of which to justify [them]” (Hall, 2014, 553). For us, they are “simply there”, and that is “an end to justifications” (PHD, 195-196).

7. 1. 1 - *Metaethics and Political Realism*

This section aims to provide some more explicit connections between political realists’ metaethical views and their advocacy of political realism in normative political philosophy. What impact do the problem of modernity, the no Archimedean point claim, and (most importantly) the Historicist Scepticism claim have on our normative theorising?

The best place to see this connection is in Williams’s belief that we should think about political legitimacy in an ‘internalist’ rather than an ‘externalist’ way. According to Paul Sagar, an ‘internalist’ account of political legitimacy maintains “that the conditions by which a political grouping – often but not necessarily the state – can intelligibly be said to be legitimate must be built entirely from materials available within the process of politics that is itself under analysis ... internalist accounts posit that legitimacy is and can only be a function of the beliefs of those subject to power and insofar as subjects believe that the power exercised over them is legitimate, *it therefore is*” (Sagar, 2018, 114).⁷⁶ The best example of an internalist account of political legitimacy that political realists generally adhere to is Williams’s account of political legitimacy and the Basic Legitimation Demand. Williams’s account is not purely a function of the beliefs of those subject to power in the sense that there are certain constraints on what can count as legitimate. For example, the axiom ‘might is not right’ and the Critical Theory Principle are not necessarily functions of the beliefs of those subject to power. However, both the axiom and the principle are consistent with the internalist account of legitimacy as political realists believe they are “materials available within the process of politics” (Sagar, 2018, 114).

I suggested in previous chapters that if the main motivation for holding an internalist account of legitimacy is for practical political reasons (i.e. to respond to the circumstances of radical disagreement we see in politics today), it might be that there is

⁷⁶ For the sake of simplicity, I will use the term ‘internalists’ for people who hold an internalist account of legitimacy, while I will use the term ‘externalist’ for people who hold an externalist account of legitimacy. Also for the sake of simplicity, an externalist account of legitimacy argues the opposite of an internalist account, namely that political legitimacy can be built from materials outside the process of politics under consideration and can be something that is not a function of the beliefs of those subject to power.

no real disagreement between political realists and moralists. A moralist might believe that in principle “no government is legitimate that does not show equal concern for the fate of all those citizens over whom it claims dominion and from whom it claims allegiance. Equal concern is the sovereign virtue of political community – without it government is only tyranny” and that the only morally right use of political power is the liberal principle of legitimacy (Dworkin, 2000, 1). However, they would also accept that under certain circumstances, if a political agent wanted to resolve real world disagreements on the basis of these two principles alone, they are unlikely to be successful. For example, if I attempted to establish order (based on the sovereign virtue of government) in a society where people are mostly Nazis, I would fail to establish an authoritative order. If we assume that in most cases, some form of order is better than no political order at all, it can be said that the morally right thing to do (all things considered) is to engage in some form of compromise that takes us some distance away from the correct principles of legitimacy. However, this would not necessarily change the fact that the right/true/reasonable standard of legitimacy that governments should meet is that they should treat their citizens with equal concern and respect and that when they use political power, they use it in a way that respects the liberal principle of legitimacy.

Internalist accounts of legitimacy want to go further than this practical point. The definition of an internalist account of legitimacy stated above has a much stronger condition, namely that “legitimacy is **and can only be** a function of the beliefs of those subject to power” (Sagar, 2018, 114, emphasis mine). They want to reject Dworkin’s more categorical claim of equal concern as the basis of political legitimacy. In previous chapters, I showed why rejecting moral principles due to their inability to resolve conflict and establish order in the real world is implausible. If political realists had no metaethical beliefs (or more accurately, if they shared the same metaethical beliefs with moralists), we would have to accept that external accounts of legitimacy are more attractive than internal accounts. They provide the critical distance we would expect from a normative account of legitimacy.⁷⁷ However, political realists reject categorical/universal claims such as the one made by Dworkin. His belief that

⁷⁷ Of course, moralists could easily accept that internalist accounts of legitimacy are useful and interesting for those who are interested in sociological or historical questions. However, they would reject it as a plausible basis for a normative account of legitimacy.

government should provide every citizen with equal concern might ‘make sense’ to us now that we are liberals. However, Dworkin’s equal concern standard is only our standard; there is no Archimedean point from which we can argue that people from different social worlds in the past and in the distant future need to meet this standard. With these metaethical claims in mind, the desire for political theorists to be more realistic and think about legitimacy in the way that political realists want becomes clearer. There is no alternative to thinking about legitimacy in the way that they advocate. Dworkin’s definition of a legitimate government is not true, but simply ‘what we do’.

Williams insists that if someone wants to theorise about political legitimacy in an externalist way, they need to provide a theory of error for why people in the past have not seen the truth of the externalist standard. Williams argues that moralists have a poor account of history, which is why they have “no answer ... to the question of why what it takes to be the true moral solution to the questions of politics, liberalism, should for the first time (roughly) become evident in European culture from the late seventeenth century onward, and why these truths have been concealed from other people. Moralistic liberalism cannot plausibly explain, adequately to its moral pretensions, why, when, and by whom it has been accepted and rejected.” (*IBWD*, 9). In other words, if externalists were to insist that it is true that all legitimate governments must treat every citizen with equal concern and respect, he would need to provide an error theory of why it was him that reached the truth and everyone before him (who did not also make that case) did not have access to this truth. Political realists such as Geuss and Williams argue that many advocates of liberalism we see in the literature today are universalist, which leads them to hold implausible views. For example, Williams argues “the outlook of liberal universalism holds that if certain human rights [or more general, liberal values] exist, they have always existed, and if societies in the past did not recognise them, then that is because either those in charge were wicked, or the society did not, for some reason, understand the existence of those rights” (*IBWD*, 65). There are at least two implications we can draw from this statement. Firstly, there is something strange about liberal human rights existing throughout time. Secondly, the more important implication is that if these liberal rights did exist, no one recognised them before the emergence of western liberal states. The only explanation that is available to liberal universalists who believe that these liberal rights exist and have always existed is that societies that did not

recognise these liberal rights were either wicked or stupid. The second implication is implausible. There were many smart and reasonable (in the conventional sense) individuals who were not liberals, or did not recognise liberal rights, such as Confucius, Plato, and Aristotle. What moralists who have universalistic tendencies need is some form of error theory that does not simply state that people who did not recognise human rights and liberal values were wicked or irrational. We can refer to this as the *error theory challenge*.

According to Williams, when faced with the liberal universalist outlook, we have two options. The first is to argue that liberalism is not the correct political theory because smart and reasonable people have disagreed with it throughout history. Williams refers to the 'queasy liberal' who acknowledges that "if liberalism is correct, it must apply to all these past people who were not liberals: they ought to have been liberals, and since they were not, they were bad, or stupid, or something on those lines ... but these are foolish things to think about all those past people ... he concludes, liberalism cannot be correct" (*IBWD*, 67). Relative to the universalistic moralist, the queasy liberal has a deeper respect for history and how history plays into the development of political convictions (including their own). However, Williams believes that this is the wrong option to take. Instead, we should take the second option, which is to "give up the universalist belief" (*IBWD*, 67). If we gave up our liberal views or held our liberal views with a sense of irony, as Rorty advocates, it would still be a position "under the shadow of universalism: it suggests that you cannot really believe in liberalism unless you hold it true in a sense which means it applies to everyone" (*IBWD*, 67).

Internalists of legitimacy avoid the problems associated with liberal universalism because they do not base their conception of legitimacy on universal claims. Instead, they provide a historical account of why it is that in today's world we accept liberalism, in a way that meets the charitable error theory challenge. For example, Williams states that in the history of European culture where liberalism emerged, there was a rise in the "expectations of what a state can do", which raised the standard of "what counts as being disadvantaged" (*IBWD*, 7). This led to "more demanding standards of what counts as a threat to people's vital interests"; for example, liberals recognised that "rights of free speech" are so important because "it is important that citizens and others should know whether the Basic Legitimation Demand is being met" (*IBWD*, 7).

Williams also believes that, due to the conditions of modernity, we now find that “rationalisations of disadvantage in terms of race and gender are invalid” partly because of “Enlightenment reason that other supposed legitimations are now seen to be false and in particular ideological” (*IBWD*, 7-8). All of these historical explanations suggest that in the social world and the practices we live under here and now, liberalism is the only answer that makes sense. However, this does not mean that liberal principles are the only true moral solution to politics, and everyone else throughout history who did not abide by these principles got it wrong.

Williams and Geuss have repeatedly argued that political philosophy needs history and that contemporary moral and political philosophy has not sufficiently appreciated its own history. We know that “our and others’ convictions have to a great degree been the product of previous historical conditions, and of an obscure mixture of beliefs (many incompatible with one another), passions, interests, and so forth”, which Williams sometimes refers to as a “complex historical deposit” (*IBWD*, 13 and Williams, 1995, 189). Because of this, when engaging in normative theorising, “we would be merely naïve if we took our convictions and those of our opponents, as simply autonomous products of moral reason rather than as another product of historical conditions. Even in the very short term, a minority conception can become mainstream or vice versa, and there can be significant changes in what counts as a conceivable or credible option” (*IBWD*, 13). We can see how this belief in the radical contingency of our ethical conceptions can have a negative impact and a positive impact on our normative theorising. By negative impact, I mean how the Historicist Scepticism claim undermines some of our ideal normative theories. By positive impact, I mean how the claim guides us towards how we can properly engage in normative theorising.

We can start with the negative impact. Geuss finds it problematic that in Rawls’s work, the “topic of ‘power’ ... is simply one he never explicitly discusses at all” (Geuss, 2008, 90). We have discussed the ‘political side’ of why political realists find this problematic in previous chapters (for example, without some understanding of political power, who holds it and what political agents should do to obtain and maintain it, there will be no change towards the direction advocated by normative theories). However, not explicitly discussing power is also puzzling for metaethical reasons. As Geuss argues “to think that an appropriate point of departure for understanding the political world is *our*

intuitions of what is 'just', *without* reflecting on where those intuitions come from, how they are maintained, and what interests they might serve, seems to exclude from the beginning the very possibility that these intuitions might themselves be 'ideological'" (Geuss, 2008, 90). When ideal theories attempt to be 'impartial', Geuss argues that they will "be more likely to reinforce the power of these entrenched prejudices because it will explicitly present them as universal, warranted by reason, etc." (Geuss, 2008, 89). If political realists like Geuss believe there "are no interesting 'eternal questions' of political philosophy", we can regard ideal theorising (at least in the way that we see it in the field today) as being impossible, or at best a "potential ideological intervention" (Geuss, 2008, 13 and 94).

Instead of engaging in philosophy, which for the sake of simplicity let us refer to as the pursuit of objective truths and knowledge, what they are instead doing is further entrenching an ideology. Geuss makes very strong claims about Rawls's work, particularly in *A Theory of Justice*. Geuss argues that its central purpose is to let "people who observe great inequality in their societies...continue to feel good about themselves, provided that they support some cosmetic forms of redistribution" (Geuss, 2016). He argues that modern capitalism is a prison and Rawls puts a 'benevolent smile' on the prison warden. However, "the fact remains ... the prison is a prison. To shift attention from the reality of the prison to the morality, the ideals and the beliefs of the warden is an archetypical instance of an ideological effect (Geuss, 2016). Geuss also has harsh words for Nozick. When questioning Nozick and his belief that individuals have inviolable rights and there are side constraints on how we can treat them, Geuss states that "he then allows that bald statement to lie flapping and gasping for breath like a large, moribund fish on the deck of a trawler, with no analysis or discussion, and proceeds to draw consequences from it" (Geuss, 2008, 64).

To put it in less polemical terms, political realists argue that many forms of moralistic political philosophy are "constructing a practical doctrine with certain political ends in mind" rather than engaging in the pursuit of a universal truth (Gaus, 2013, 183). Like all ideologies, political philosophers are engaged in "the inevitable act of decontesting the essentially contestable" (Freedman, 2004, 16). Rather than engaging in a process of contestation, ideologies reconfigure things that are the product of historical accident and repackage them as somehow natural, universally true, or ordained by God. As

Geuss argues “the reasons why we have most of the political and moral concepts that we have (in the forms we have them) are contingent, historical reasons, and only a historical account will give us the beginnings of understanding of them and allow us to reflect critically on them rather than simply taking them for granted” (Geuss, 2008, 69).

The positive impact of the Historicist Scepticism claim is that normative analysis needs historical and social understanding. Williams does not believe that the radical contingency of our beliefs means that “we throw our political convictions away: we have no reason to end up with none, or with someone else’s. Nor does it mean that we stare at our convictions with ironical amazement, as Rorty suggests” (*IBWD*, 13). We can start with universal human needs, but we need to know more about how those universals manifest themselves in our own practices and why they take the form that they do for us here and now. As Williams argues “there is a universal human need for qualities such as accuracy (the disposition to acquire true beliefs) and sincerity (the disposition to say, if anything, what one believes to be true), the form of these dispositions and of the motivations that they embody are culturally and historically various. If one is to understand our own view of such things ... one must try to understand why they take certain forms here rather than others, and one can only do that with the help of history ... Philosophy has to learn the lesson that conceptual description (or, more specifically, analysis) is not self-sufficient; and that such projects as deriving our concepts *a priori* from universal conditions of human life, though they indeed have a place ... are likely to leave unexplained many features that provoke philosophical enquiry” (*PHD*, 192). Most writing on political realism has been negative, in the sense that political realists have spent more time and energy writing about what is wrong with contemporary political philosophy than engaging in what they perceive to be the right way of engaging in normative political philosophy. However, the few examples of ‘positive’ political realism can be seen in the discussion of the concept of political legitimacy and political liberty, both of which involve substantial engagement with our historical context (*IBWD*, 4 and 75; Hall, 2015).

7. 2 - Responding to the Challenge of Historicist Scepticism

There are several ways political moralists could respond to the issues raised in the first half of this chapter. The first is the Rawlsian Strategy of Avoidance. I discuss Rawls’s

reasons for developing a freestanding political conception of justice, one that avoids controversial metaethical truths. My aim in that section is not necessarily to argue that Rawls is correct, although I am generally sympathetic to his approach. Instead, my aim is to show the implications the Rawlsian Strategy of Avoidance has for political realism, namely that the political views of political realists seem to be in tension with their metaethical views. Rawls accepts that politics (the need to manage disagreement and achieve stability) leads him to avoid controversial metaethical views. And yet, political realists, who believe that Rawlsians have not fully accepted just how significant the problem of pluralism and disagreement is, base their position and their critique on extremely controversial metaethical views. The second response I discuss will be the provision of an error theory and what liberal universalists can say about societies that have not had liberal views.

7. 2. 1 - The Rawlsian Strategy of Avoidance (and its implications for political realism)

The first response moralists could use against the challenge of historicist scepticism is the Rawlsian strategy of avoiding controversial metaethical truths in order to generate agreement amongst reasonable people. One of the features of a Rawlsian political conception of justice is that it “is presented as a freestanding view” (*PL*, 12). He argues that “the political conception is a module, an essential constituent part, that fits into and can be supported by various reasonable comprehensive doctrines that endure in the society regulated by it. This means that it can be presented without saying, or knowing, or hazarding a conjecture about, what such doctrines it may belong to, or be supported by” (*PL*, 12-13). Any conception of justice that relied on the truth of any controversial idea of metaethics would lead to disagreement amongst reasonable people. This means that in order to generate stability for the right reasons, a political conception of justice should avoid relying on any controversial claims.⁷⁸

If we avoid truths about comprehensive doctrines, where do we have the resources to build a political conception of justice? This brings us to another important element of a political conception of justice, namely that “its content is expressed in terms of certain fundamental ideas seen as implicit in the public political culture of a democratic society. This public culture comprises the political institutions of a constitutional regime and

⁷⁸ For more analysis of why this is the case, see the chapter 6 on Rawls.

the public traditions of their interpretation (including those of the judiciary), as well as historic texts and documents that are common knowledge” (*PL*, 13-14). The reason for this is that “justification is addressed to others, it proceeds from what is, or can be, held in common: and so we begin from shared fundamental ideas implicit in the public political culture in the hope of developing from them a political conception that can gain free and reasoned agreement in judgment” (*PL*, 100-101).

An important lesson to draw from this strategy of avoiding controversial comprehensive doctrines is that there is something inconsistent about the political realist’s commitment to engaging with real politics and their commitment to their metaethical claims. Political realists argue that politics is a special domain because of radical disagreement. It is this belief that allows them to claim that moralists have not taken politics seriously enough. Engaging with reasonable disagreement is a very small subset of disagreement that politics is meant to engage with. However, Rawls recognises that relying on controversial truths about metaethics and the status of moral claims can cause more disagreement than convergence.⁷⁹ For this reason, Rawls avoids making claims that suggest that his conception of justice as fairness is ‘true’ or is somehow part of the fabric of the universe that can be used to play Kant in the Court of King Arthur. Political realists argue that (even under these circumstances) Rawls’s attempts to establish an overlapping consensus is impossible and misguided (Galston, 2010; Sleat, 2013). They repeat Rawls’s claim that Rawls’s political conception of justice is “of course, a moral conception”, which is the reason why people would not develop a consensus around these principles, because if we could converge around a set of moral principles, we would not need politics (*PL*, 11; Rossi and Sleat 2014). Political realists pride themselves in being able to make normative recommendations that are more suited to managing real world disagreement. However, political realists also hold very controversial metaethical and metaphysical beliefs. It seems strange to believe that the outcome of political realists normative theorising, which relies on these controversial metaethical truths, will be any more capable of establishing an authoritative order than Rawlsian approaches to normative theory. This is not an argument that their metaethical

⁷⁹ Of course, political realists also believe this. They rely on the Hobbesian belief that sincere moral beliefs can actually generate more disagreement and conflict rather than less.

claims are wrong. It is simply to state that their metaethical beliefs seem to pull away from their commitment to engaging with the real circumstances of radical disagreement.

A realist might respond to this charge of inconsistency by claiming that their method for engaging in political theorising is very contextual. We can see this in their account of political legitimacy, which is dependent on the historical context of the authority and what 'makes sense' to those who are told to obey the commands of the authority. Political realists might argue that because their account of legitimacy is very contextual, it is much more likely to generate agreement and authoritative decision making, especially compared to more moralistic and universalistic accounts of legitimacy. Why legitimisation stories have to be extremely contextual is unimportant, as long as the legitimisation story provided by the authority generates sufficient agreement within its own historical and spatial context. However, this response is unlikely to succeed. Imagine a state in which the majority population is Jewish and there is a minority population of Christians in the 1900's. The state has answered the First Political Question by establishing order amongst this population, and one of the ways it has done this is by being tolerant of the practices of the Christianity. The state has met the Basic Legitimation Demand by providing this legitimisation story to the minority Christian population, namely that they are being tolerant of their religion, especially when they don't necessarily need to be because they are a minority of the overall population. The Christian population might respond by asking why the state is providing them with a legitimisation story at all. They believe that for a state to be legitimate, it has to be a Christian state, and that every state before them (and every state that might emerge after) is illegitimate unless it is Christian. Providing a legitimisation story (which makes their authority a form of political authority rather than domination) is preferable to oppression and civil strife, but irrelevant to what they consider to be the standards of legitimate government. They might even go further by arguing that providing them with a legitimisation story is simply a rationalisation of their successful establishment of power. Presumably in any political and historical context (if we assume radical disagreement), there will be people who not only question the legitimisation story provided by their governments, but also what the proper standard of legitimisation is. A political realist might argue that there are no universal moral claims such as 'all legitimate governments are Christian', which is why the only way to make sense of political legitimacy is contextual in the way that they advocate. However, this is exactly what the Christian

would deny. It might even be the case that the tolerant Jewish population would reject that metaethical claim as well and claim that their conception of legitimacy is based on their own religious traditions, which they believe are universal. The point is, that Rawlsians try to avoid this by not relying on controversial metaethical truths for constructing conceptions of justice and legitimacy, because there is reasonable disagreement about these truths. It seems strange that the group of theorists who have consistently stated that Rawls does not engage with the radical disagreement that politics is meant to engage with, theorise about politics in the way that Rawls tries to avoid because he believes it will cause disagreement.

7. 2. 2 - Providing an Error Theory for Liberal Universalists: Meeting the Charitable Error Theory Challenge

Some of the responses I discuss below reject the need for a theory of error for why, if we believe that liberal principles are the correct principles to regulate politics today, they were unknown to people before the emergence of liberal democratic societies. However, this does not mean that it is impossible for liberals to provide such a theory of error. This is what George Tsai tries to do. He starts off by agreeing that we should not assume cognitive and moral deficiency when asking why liberal values did not really emerge until the 18th century. There were obviously people who were wicked and stupid throughout history, but it would be implausible to rely on that as your only answer to the question of why people before us did not ‘discover’ liberal principles. He also agrees with historicists that “any given culture sets boundaries to the ethical understanding of its people, constraining their access to ethical ideas ... membership in a particular culture can be essential or helpful to understanding various moral matters ... Like epistemic access, effective moral motivation also depends on the character of one’s institutional surroundings” (Tsai, 2013, 312). I suspect, that most moral and political philosophers accept these epistemic and moral limitations as well.

We can look at the social and historical conditions that people were in to see how liberal values were epistemically inaccessible or made motivations to live up to liberal values unavailable (Tsai, 2013). Williams does this himself when he discusses what the Ancient Greeks thought about Slavery. He argues that the Ancient Greeks were aware that slavery was terrible for those who experienced it. However, they did not believe that slavery was an institution that lay inside the considerations of justice, because it was

seen as a necessity. As Williams argues “considerations of justice and injustice were immobilised by the demands of what was seen as social and economic necessity” (Williams, 1993, 125). Due to this necessity, most Greeks simply believed that it was simply bad luck for those who were subject to slavery; they could not see any societal alternative.

Tsai provides several examples of a similar type of socio-historical analysis. He starts with prehistoric humans, who “lived in conditions that would have made the rise of the great monotheistic religions hard for them to envision” (Tsai, 2013, 313). Some political scientists argue that it was the increasing size of collective groups (with fewer ties of community that maintain order) that led to the emergence of monotheistic religions, which means that we are discussing people who lived in small tribes (Fukuyama, 2011). It was these monotheistic religions that generally established the foundations of liberal values, that “include notions such as that all human beings have dignity, that they are in some normative sense free and equal, that vengeance should be morally rejected, and so on” and without these foundations, it seems implausible to believe that people would think of or accept various liberal rights and duties (Tsai, 2013, 313). In these small tribes with very homogenous populations, it would be understandable why these individuals would not see the liberal virtue of toleration to be a moral virtue. Like Rawls, Tsai argues that the “*practice* of toleration ... emerged during and after the European Wars of Religion”, which led to centuries of violent sectarian conflict (Tsai, 2013, 314). This leads Scheffler to believe that it is “a rare stroke of political good fortune that, in their efforts to defuse violent sectarian conflict, liberal societies devised arrangements and institutions that turn out also to make available their own distinctive satisfactions and rewards” (Scheffler, 2010, 11). We start to see an ethos of toleration emerging amongst the people. If these historical conditions and developments did not emerge, it seems unlikely that toleration would be regarded as a moral and political virtue. There were clearly mistaken non-moral views that played a role in the development of non-liberal outlooks throughout history. Tsai lists Aristotle as an example. He “believed that some human beings were naturally slaves: lacking the capacity for deliberation and foresight ... it was partially on the basis of adherence to misinformed biological theories that he did so” (Tsai, 2013, 316). We now live in a more scientific world, which makes it much easier for us to reject the idea that there is a natural hierarchy.

I cannot go through all the examples of socio-historical analysis that Tsai provides in this chapter. However, it is important to note that none of the examples provided above relied purely on the fact that people were wicked or stupid, which means that the charitable error theory challenge has been met. There were good reasons to believe that people would not have epistemic or motivational access to liberal virtues and principles, and it seems likely that the most ardent liberal today, if they were born in those conditions, would not hold those liberal views. We can understand why they would hold those views, given their historical and social condition. Even if not all elements of Tsai's analysis are accurate, his work shows that it is possible even for universalistic liberals to provide a theory of error for why others have not had liberal views, in a way that does not simply register them as wicked or stupid.

The fact that we can understand why distant historical peoples held different views raises a more important worry. The political realist is not just interested in the provision of an error theory. They want to say something stronger. If there were social and historical conditions that prevented them from gaining epistemic access to liberal values, how is it possible that we can say that these liberal rights or principles applied to them or are universally justifiable? Furthermore, how is it fair that we should blame people who have acted in ways that go against liberal morality? We discussed a similar question to this before when we discussed the idea of 'ought implies can' and whether that applies constraints on how we engage in normative theorising. If it was not possible for an agent to epistemically access these principles, how is it possible that they should have acted in ways that liberals believe they should?

There are at least three questions we need to answer, that are similar but distinct. The first is whether liberal values are universally justifiable to everyone, regardless of historical context. The second is whether we should blame people who do not abide by liberal principles, or act in illiberal ways, again, regardless of time. Finally, we need to question whether we should consider liberal values to be universally applicable, namely that when someone in a non-liberal time period and culture acts in ways that a liberal would find morally impermissible, should we be able to say that they are acting immorally.

One answer to the question of whether liberal values are universally justifiable is to accept that for some cultural-historical viewpoints, liberal justifications do not have

rationally persuasive force. In other words, liberal universalists “should give up the assumption that liberal values ‘are simply in the light of reason’ superior to other sets of values” (Tsai, 2013, 320-321). However, I do not believe this is the best answer. I think most liberals agree that there will always be some people (even in our time) who will not find some liberal principles or values to be rationally persuasive. This alone does not give us good reason to believe we should not regard them as superior to other principles. That has much more to do with the reasons we have for accepting one principle over another; the mere fact of disagreement alone should not make us drop our beliefs if we have good reasons to believe them. I will discuss this further when I talk about historical contingency and importantly the fact of historical diversity. When it comes to the question of blaming individuals in distant times, I believe most sensible people would agree with Williams that we should “not get indignant with Louis XIV” when he does not replace his monarchy with a liberal regime (*IBWD*, 66). It is true that he simply would not have recognised that he ought to have done so, because these ideas were simply inaccessible to him. Most liberals would also consider it a waste of time, maybe even inappropriate, to consider almost all individuals throughout history as blameworthy for not believing that people were all free and equal.

Liberals do not necessarily have to consider individuals throughout history as blameworthy. However, liberals can still argue that certain practices were wrong or that people acted in morally impermissible ways. As Tsai argues “they could hold that certain liberal principles designate rights and duties possessed by all persons ... at all times ... They could criticise the *moral-political systems* of historically and culturally distant societies for failing to serve the needs of all their members, for excluding groups within the society from having the chance to develop their talents properly, and for rejecting the notion that all people have equal moral worth” (Tsai, 2013, 322). I showed in previous chapters that there are good reasons to use the word ‘ought’ in several ways. It might be true that from a belief-relative perspective someone who is raised in a non-liberal society acts impermissibly from a liberal point of view, we can say that they did not act wrongly. However, in a fact-relative sense, we should be able to say that that someone acted impermissibly. It might be a waste of time to do this, but I don’t believe that it is in any way wrong or inappropriate to do so.

7. 3 - Rejecting Some of the Implications of Historical Contingency

Political realists might not find the Rawlsian view of avoidance sufficient. They could argue that the strategy of avoidance is ultimately impossible; eventually, there will be a moment where political liberals such as Rawls have to accept the truth of some controversial claims. On the other hand, political moralists who do not use the strategy of avoidance could argue that the strategy gives too much ground to the metaethical views of political realists, which are extremely controversial and should be argued against. This section aims to provide reasons for rejecting some of the implications of historical contingency.

It is important to start with the fact that I believe most sensible people will accept that their beliefs come from somewhere. We are all, to a large extent, the product of our own society, culture, and history. Families and family upbringing plays a large role in the views we ultimately develop. Significant historical events in our time can play a big role in what we consider to be important topics for discussion in moral and political philosophy. I think it would be strange to try and argue that historical contingency plays no role in the views we hold. What moralists need to do is reject the implications of the argument from historical accident and its role in undermining the authority of our moral views.

We can start with the *No Archimedean Point* claim. To ask for an Archimedean point of our moral and ethical views is to ask for a point of view outside of the domain of morality to validate morality. We want to provide the objective grounds of morality to the extent that we could convince someone who is amoral to be moral. I believe moral realists such as Dworkin, Parfit, and Larmore would agree with Williams that we cannot find an Archimedean point outside the domain of morality to validate morality. However, they would also argue that asking for an Archimedean point is the wrong question, because it fails “to recognise that morality forms a realm of irreducible value. We cannot explain why it should matter to us by appealing to interests and motivations that are presumably more basic ... Morality speaks for itself” (Larmore, 2008, 88).

Parfit argues that there are ‘irreducibly normative truths’ and because they are irreducibly normative, we cannot explain them in non-normative terms, which is what someone who asks for an Archimedean Point (for morality) is asking for. Parfit gives a

set of examples of concepts that cannot be explained by empirical or ordinary natural truths. For example, we “should not expect to explain time, or logic, in non-temporal or non-logical terms” (Parfit, 2006, 331). When we say that $2 + 2 = 4$, this is not a physical fact or a scientific fact, nor is it a “legal or arithmetical fact that galaxies rotate” (Parfit, 2011, 324). Parfit believes the same is true for normative truths and concepts, which means that we cannot answer the question what normative concepts such as ‘ought’ and ‘reason’ mean “in a way that is both interesting and true.” (Parfit, 2006, 331). Scanlon makes a similar claim when he says he treats “the idea of a reason as primitive. Any attempt to explain what it is to be a reason for something seems to me to lead back to the same idea: a consideration that counts in favour of it. ‘Counts in favour how?’ one might ask. ‘By providing a reason for it’ seems to be the only answer” (Scanlon, 1998, 17).

Dworkin argues that when we talk about morality and moral claims, we cannot help but talk about them from within the domain of morality. He rejects all forms of Archimedean scepticism about values. Dworkin makes a distinction between internal and external scepticism. According to Dworkin “internal scepticism about morality is a first-order, substantive moral judgment. It appeals to more abstract judgments about morality in order to deny that certain more concrete or applied judgments are true. External scepticism, on the contrary, purports to rely entirely on second-order, external statements about morality” (Dworkin, 2011, 31). It is important to note that Dworkin does not believe that all forms of scepticism are unintelligible. Internal sceptics “rely on morality to denigrate morality”, which means that “[internal scepticism] does not deny – on the contrary it assumes – that moral judgments are capable of truth” because the internal sceptic is making a moral claim (Dworkin, 2011, 31-34). However, to ask for an Archimedean point for our moral and ethical beliefs, and denying the existence of this point, is not to engage in internal scepticism. It is instead, a form of external scepticism. It “stands above morality and judges it from outside ... External sceptics do claim to be sceptical about morality all the way down. They are able to denigrate moral truth, they say, without relying on it” (Dworkin, 2011, 31-32).

The simplest way to explain Dworkin’s rejection of external scepticism is by observing that it contradicts itself. For Dworkin, “moral scepticism is itself a moral position ... if it is true, then external scepticism defeats itself. An external error sceptic holds that all

moral judgments are objectively false, and an external status sceptic that moral judgments do not even purport to be true. Each contradicts himself if his own sceptical judgment is itself a moral judgment; surely he must claim truth for his own philosophical position” (Dworkin, 2011, 40). Morality is a domain of thought with its own set of questions. Someone might argue that “no one ever has a moral obligation because moral obligations could be created only by a god and there is no god” while another person could argue that “no one ever has a moral obligation because there are no queer entities that could constitute a moral obligation” (Dworkin, 2011, 41). Both these people are making different arguments linguistically, but the “*content* of the two claims – what the different sceptics claim to be the case, morally speaking – is the same” namely that no moral claims are true (Dworkin, 2011, 41). Remember that for Dworkin, external sceptics “rely entirely on second-order, external statements about morality” rather than denigrating morality through first-order moral judgments (Dworkin, 2011, 31). And yet, in relying on second-order external statements, they reach a moral conclusion, namely that there is no such thing as moral obligation and that everything is morally permissible (as there is no queer entity that establishes the fact that certain acts are morally impermissible). Dworkin believes that they need to accept at least one moral claim is true, namely that everything is morally permissible, which means that external scepticism contradicts itself. Dworkin gives a helpful example when he states “we may say that no claim anyone makes about the shape or colour of unicorns is true because there are no unicorns. But we can’t then declare that no proposition of unicorn zoology can be true” (Dworkin, 2011, 41). According to Dworkin, anyone who asks for an Archimedean Point for our moral views violates “the principle of moral epistemology I called Hume’s principle. This holds that no series of propositions about how the world is, as a matter of scientific or metaphysical fact, can provide a successful case on its own – without some value judgment hidden in the interstices – for any conclusion about what ought to be the case” (Dworkin, 2011, 44).

When Larmore defends the autonomy of morality, he starts with the ‘distinctive’ feature of moral thinking, which he states “involves seeing another’s good as a reason for action on my part” (Larmore, 2008, 88). He discusses several attempts (namely the Hobbesian and Kantian approach) to provide an external validation to the question ‘what reason have I to be moral?’ and he tries to show how ultimately they fail to recognise this distinctive feature of morality. For example, Hobbesian attempts to base morality on

mutual advantage (and therefore provide a basis for morality on prudence) fail not only because they are unable to provide a satisfactory answer to the free-rider problem, but because they have to admit that we owe nothing to strangers and to people who cannot retaliate, such as the weak, or future generations. Larmore argues that “a hallmark of the moral point of view is precisely the respect it requires us to show toward people who, through circumstance or misfortune, may never be in a position to benefit us in return” (Larmore, 2008, 99).⁸⁰ This gap between this moral point of view and the idea that morality is mutual advantage shows how problematic it is to not let morality ‘speak for itself’.

While many people question the objectivity of moral reasons, few question the objectivity of prudential reasons with equal vigour. When theorising about politics, political realists are willing to mix prudential reasons, such as the desire for political survival, into their normative theorising about politics. However, is there an Archimedean point for the value of prudence? Larmore asks us to “consider, as an analogy, how we would go about changing the mind of someone who perceives no reason, in deciding what to do, to take into account the desires that he will surely have later even if they are not his at present” (Larmore, 2008, 104). If we find nothing obviously problematic about their reasoning, we can only ask them to reconsider from the standpoint of prudence. Larmore argues that “reasons of prudence are *sui generis*, intelligible only in their own terms”, and the same is true for the domain of morality (Larmore, 2008, 104).

Whilst I believe the ‘moral realist’ position I discussed above is the best metaethical view, I accept that discussions of metaethics and metaphysics are controversial. For example, while I am unsympathetic to this idea, naturalists believe there are normative

⁸⁰ Someone might argue that accepting this ‘hallmark’ of morality is somehow begging the question. However, I am not certain what arguments people would give to reject the hallmark. Gauthier, one of the most prominent Hobbesian contractarian thinkers, states that we have no other choice but accept his view of morality because morality faces “a foundational crisis” (Gauthier, 1991, 15). He does not really go into why there is a foundational crisis, instead he cites arguments from Bernard Williams, Alasdair MacIntyre and J. L. Mackie. Presumably he means, just like Williams believes, the authority of morality that came from God or other Metaphysical conceptions no longer exist. I will discuss some of the arguments that suggest that this foundational crisis is not a crisis later on in this chapter. However, Larmore makes a simple point to suggest that his ‘hallmark’ of morality originally comes from the Bible, namely to ‘love thy neighbour as thyself’. He asks, even though his hallmark is based on Scripture, “Can one really maintain that it makes sense only within a religious worldview?” (Larmore, 2008, 100).

facts, but they are reducible to natural facts. I do not want to tether the overall plausibility of my arguments in my thesis to one position in metaethics if there is no reason for me to do so. My aim is not to say that my argument is correct because moral realism is correct. Instead, my argument is that historicist scepticism is wrong. We can accept that that is true from a wide variety of metaethical viewpoints, such as naturalism or constructivism. Because of this, it may be better to provide negative arguments against some of the claims made by political realists, rather than trying to develop positive arguments for one particular metaethical view.⁸¹ This will be the aim of the rest of this chapter.

7. 3. 1 - Explanation and Justification

The main argument I believe political moralists should use against the historicist scepticism of political realists is that they are relying on an explanation of our moral beliefs and convictions to undermine our moral justifications and reasons for holding those beliefs. In other words, by relying on historicist scepticism, political realists seem to be committing the genetic fallacy. We want an answer to the question ‘what makes a moral claim true?’ Williams is sceptical about categorical moral claims, and he is sceptical because he looks at our history and how our moral convictions emerged. When he wants to know whether we can be confident in our moral and ethical beliefs, he looks at how these beliefs emerged throughout our own history (and broader lessons from the social sciences) to see if we can vindicate (or debunk) these beliefs in some way. But we should remember that there are at least two different questions here. The first is why I believe a moral claim is true. The second is how I obtained my political convictions. For example, we can use the argument that universities should engage in affirmative action admission policies. I have several reasons why I believe this is true and I would provide these reasons as justification for why I believe universities ought to engage in affirmative action policies. I might argue that minority populations are unfairly disadvantaged in society, or that diversity in a university system has instrumental and intrinsic value.

⁸¹ Some moral realists I discussed above might say that the only thing we can do is to provide negative arguments against other metaethical views. In response the moral realists Samuel Clarke and Richard Price, Christine Korsgaard argued that they were “primarily polemical writers. They could not prove that obligation was real, and instead they devoted their efforts to rebutting what they took to be sceptical attacks on morality” (Korsgaard, 1996, 31). Parfit admits that in response to this critique, “given my beliefs about normativity, I have no alternative” (Parfit, 2006, 332).

Someone might respond to my argument by claiming that I clearly only believe those arguments because I grew up in a very left-wing household. This might, at best, give me reasons to think again. However, it does nothing to undermine the reasons and justifications I provided. I know that even though my world view is influenced by my upbringing, when engaging in moral justification, I do not cite my upbringing as a reason for my belief that universities should engage in affirmative action policies.

Of course, political realists will argue that there is something more to their argument when they question the origins of our convictions. A moral realist might argue that there is an independent domain of morality and normativity. In response to this claim, a political realist can ask the question ‘how did someone gain access to this domain?’ This is where the demand for a theory of error gets its biggest sway. When someone says that liberalism is the true moral solution to politics, how did they gain access to this truth? How is it that few people have gained access to this truth throughout history? To a certain extent, Dworkin agrees with sceptics who make reference to the problem of historical diversity. He agrees that it shows that moral conviction is not caused by moral truth. Instead, “people’s personal histories, rather than any encounters with moral truth, cause their convictions. If so, some combination of convergence and diversity is exactly what we should expect. People’s personal histories have a very great deal in common, starting with the human genome. Their situation, everywhere and always, is such that they are very likely to think that murder for private gain is wrong, for instance. But these histories also have a great deal not in common: the habitats, economies, and religions of people differ in ways that also make it predictable that they will disagree about morality too” (Dworkin, 2011, 47-48). However, “because diversity is just a matter of anthropological fact, it cannot on its own show that all positive moral judgments are false. People, in their diversity, must still decide what is true, and this is a matter of the justification of conviction, not the best explanation of either convergence or divergence” (Dworkin, 2011, 48). It might be true that the “actual variations in the moral codes are more readily explained by the hypothesis that they reflect ways of life than by the hypothesis that they reflect perceptions, most of them seriously inadequate and badly distorted, of objective values”, but this misses the point that explaining the origins of our convictions is not the same thing as undermining our justifications for our moral claims (Mackie, 1977, 37).

The same can be said about the political realists who charge that moralistic political philosophy is ideological. Before I analyse the limitations of arguing against a normative political theory by pointing out its ideological distortions, I want to show how problematic Geuss's interpretations of moralistic political philosophers are. To argue that Rawls is putting a smile on the prison warden's face of the capitalist prison is an extremely poor and uncharitable interpretation of Rawls's work. He is unfortunately not the only one that interprets Rawls in this way. Leiter argues that "while Rawls ... endorsed intuitions that had implications for basic social and economic policy in capitalist societies, his theory was neither presented nor understood as threatening capitalist relations of production, a fact surely central to any explanation of how it could become so influential in capitalist democracies, at least in the universities" (Leiter, 2015, 31). This suggests not only that Rawls was an apologist or a shill for capitalism, but also that the only reason Rawls was so influential in universities was because it did not threaten capitalist relations of production. However, these interpretations not only completely ignore his conception of justice, they also ignore his work on institutional design. He sets out five ideal-types of regimes, including laissez-faire capitalism, one-party 'state' socialism, welfare-state capitalism, liberal democratic socialism, and property owning democracy. He rejects the first three, due to their inability to realise justice as fairness and is open to either property owning democracy or democratic socialism (Rawls, 2001, 136). When choosing between the two, Rawls argues that we should "look to a society's historical circumstances, to its traditions of political thought and practice, and much else", which are all things that political realists accuse Rawls of ignoring (Rawls, 2001, 139).

We can now return to what is problematic about undermining a moral justification or reason by claiming that it is ideological. Geuss argues that "an ideology, then, is a set of beliefs, attitudes, preferences that are distorted as a result of the operation of specific relations of power; the distortion will characteristically take the form of presenting these beliefs, desires, etc., as inherently connected with some universal interest, when in fact they are subservient to particular interests" (Geuss, 2008, 52). Presumably Geuss wants to argue that political philosophy is both the product of an ideology of a particular time and that it is helping entrench the ideology that it is a product of. Morality is itself the result of past politics and political battles, and therefore morality cannot ground politics (Sleat, 2018, 17). If we accept this, we have to accept that almost all forms of political

theory are the result of the operation of specific relations of power. It is plausible to believe that ideology is in some sense unavoidable. However, the question is whether or not it is problematic for the plausibility of the moral arguments provided by moralistic political philosophers.

Let us assume that it is true that “ideal theory ... is really an *ideology*, a distortional complex of ideas, values, norms, and beliefs that reflects the nonrepresentative interests and experiences of a small minority of the national population – middle-to-upper-class white males – who are hugely *over-represented* in the professional philosophical population” (Mills, 2005, 172). Knowing this, we want to know what is problematic about an ideal theory of justice itself (I believe we might all find the lack of diversity within the field of philosophy problematic, but again, this is a question of the field and its members, not about the arguments). We observe the arguments and justifications provided by the ideal theorist and we find that their theory somehow maintains a form of domination against a minority population. This should give us reason to argue that the theory is somehow problematic, and should be rejected, or revised to ensure that that form of domination is no longer an implication of the ideal society. And this is exactly what happens in philosophical and moral discussion. However, it is the fact that the implications of a theory of justice has such negative consequences that is doing the work of showing how problematic this theory of justice is. Simply pointing out the origins of the theory by itself does not do anything to undermine the justifications provided for that theory. It might give us reason to double check our work. For example, imagine I wrote a treatise on feminist philosophy. I gave presentations about the treatise in all male conferences and only asked for comments amongst my male friends and co-workers. This might give me good reasons to be embarrassed and to reconsider some of the arguments I’ve made to ensure that I have not made errors or excluded things that should not be excluded. But it alone cannot undermine the justifications provided in the treatise.⁸²

⁸² This case is just hypothetical and very unlikely to happen. However, if I wrote in this treatise that I believed that everyone is equal, the fact that I (as a male) wrote this book and only presented it to male audiences does not undermine my claim that everyone is equal. People might question my sincerity of belief of my arguments. How could it be true that I am sincerely arguing for feminism if I behaved in the way that I behaved? Again, I would agree with this sentiment. However, this is about the sincerity of my belief of those arguments, not about the justification of those arguments.

I find the appeal to historical origins and ideology in order to undermine the validity of moralistic political philosophy quite strange when it is compared to some of the other critiques made by political realists. For example, whilst Geuss and Freedman argue that a lot of political philosophy is ideological, they also argue that “as an ideology it is pretty hopeless. This is because for Freedman the measures of success and failure that apply to ideology are different to those that apply to philosophy. Here Freedman is with Geuss in thinking that ... ‘questions of definition and of purely theoretical consistency are often not the most relevant ones to ask in politics’” (Humphrey, 2012, 254). I would argue that if it is ideological, and it is problematic because it entrenches a certain set of interests, we shouldn’t be so worried about it if it isn’t very good at further entrenching those interests due to it being a poor ideology. This worry of it being ideological or entrenching a set of interests seems to go against their belief that moralistic political philosophy is problematic because no one reads it, because it is too useless or too abstract to help us deal with real world problems. Furthermore, in response to the argument about the genetic fallacy, Geuss claims that “the immediate disqualification of historical arguments as instances of the ‘genetic fallacy’ often misses the point that a historical narrative is intended to make. Historical arguments often have a completely different aim and structure from purported refutations. They are not in the first instance intended to support or refute a thesis; rather, they aim to change the structure of argument by directing attention to a new set of relevant questions that need to be asked” (Geuss, 2008, 68). This not only seems to go against Geuss’s view that political philosophy **must** be realist, there is no clear statement of how it is that ‘in the second instance’ historical arguments would refute a moral thesis.

7. 3. 2 - The Argument from Disagreement

I believe we can see the problem of historical diversity as a subset of another argument made by non-cognitivists or anti-realists in metaethics, namely the argument from disagreement. Shafer-Landau described the argument from disagreement as follows. The fact that there is “pervasive moral disagreement is good evidence for thinking that ... there isn’t any such reality that is serving as a constraint on the development of moral opinions. If moral facts were ‘out there’, awaiting discovery, then we would have to charge at least one party to a moral dispute with having made some cognitive error. But given the breadth of such disagreement, surely the most charitable and plausible account

of the matter is that no one need be mistaken. Instead, unlike successful scientists, moral interlocutors are simply registering their personal opinions, unfettered by an external moral reality that might check them ... the extent of disagreement in ethics is best explained by the absence of any objective reality that could be captured by our moral judgments” (Shafer-Landau, 2003, 216). I say that the historical scepticism argument is a subset because political realists point to historical diversity, whilst the argument from diversity points out that there is a significant amount of disagreement in the world today (and throughout history). This is especially true when compared to other domains of inquiry such as the sciences, where there is much more consensus. It seems unlikely that we will be able to generate convergence amongst the many different perspectives that exist today, and rather than saying that one party is right and every other party is wrong, it might be more plausible to say that there is no one moral truth.

There are at least three responses that we can give to the argument from disagreement. The first is that the extent of disagreement is usually exaggerated. There are many different types of disagreements that are “not *fundamentally* moral disagreements, but instead turn on differences in the (non-moral) circumstances people find themselves in” (Huemer, 2005, 129). For example, James Rachels points out that Eskimos seem to have very different values to us because they find it acceptable to kill perfectly healthy infants. We would find this morally abhorrent, and it seems like there is a fundamental moral disagreement between the two moral tribes. It seems like they do not show the basic respect that human beings deserve. However, as Rachels argues, when we ask why they find this acceptable, it is not “because they lacked respect for human life or did not love their children. An Eskimo family would always protect its babies if conditions permitted. But the Eskimos lived in a harsh environment, where food was scarce. To quote an old Eskimo saying: ‘Life is hard, and the margin of safety small.’ A family may want to nourish its babies but be unable to do so” (Rachels, 2012, 22). Rachels (2012) shows that even in the best of times, a mother could sustain very few children. Given these non-moral constraints, I suspect most people would find that there is not as deep of a moral disagreement between Eskimos and Non-Eskimos. In some cases, our moral disagreements are based on factual disagreement. For example, some people might disagree with affirmative action policies because they believe they will not help ethnic minorities, or because they disagree with the causes of economic and social inequalities between the minority and majority population. Finally, most of us discuss cases of

disagreement because they are most notable. When it comes to very paradigmatic cases of immoral actions, we tend to agree much more than we disagree. Most people throughout history have found it immoral to murder, for example. To claim that fundamental moral disagreement is exaggerated is not to say that there are no fundamental moral disagreements. The point is that our disagreements usually “take place against a backdrop of substantial moral agreement” (Huemer, 2005, 131).

The second response that we could give is to note that there are many disagreements in philosophy in general as well. In metaphysics, we have significant disagreements between Platonists and nominalists. In debates about free will, we have disagreements between libertarians, determinists, and compatibilists. The extent of disagreement in all these fields of philosophy is just as great, if not greater, than the extent we see in the field of ethics. It is easy to assume that if there are intractable disagreements in ethics, there are disagreements in these different fields of philosophy that are just as pervasive and persistent. Finally, just like in ethics, there are no “determinate methods that are agreed by all to yield truth” in these other fields of philosophy (Shafer-Landau, 2003, 220). If the argument from disagreement is sound, we should be anti-realists about all philosophical views (Shafer-Landau, 2003, 220). I suspect most political realists will be unwilling to go so far, especially if they want to make claims about politics that they believe are true, even when people disagree with them.

Finally, not all disagreement is important. We discussed this in earlier chapters when we discussed what effect the ethic of responsibility has on theorising about justice. There is a lot of disagreement in politics, but when theorising about justice, we should not be concerned with the real level of disagreement we see in politics. This is because some people might hold unreasonable, maybe even wicked views. Some might be basing their political views on incorrect empirical evidence (for example, climate change deniers). It would not be a very desirable conception of justice if we constructed it based on these views. The argument from disagreement is only significant if we knew for a fact that there would be disagreement even under ideal conditions. Someone might argue that even in ideal conditions, we and others would still disagree about normative claims. Is it true that “if everyone knew all of the relevant non-normative facts, used the same normative concepts, understood and carefully reflected on the relevant arguments, and was not affected by any distorting influence, we and others would have similar

normative beliefs”? (Parfit, 2011, 546). This is a difficult claim to defend, especially since answering yes to that question would be an empirical claim, one that we could not really test. I believe if it were true that we would not end up with similar beliefs, this would give more credibility to the historicist scepticism of political realists. However, I believe there is little reason to believe the answer to the question would be no; it certainly is not the default position. In my discussion of the ‘Error Theory of Liberal Universalism’, I discussed several sources of error that explained why smart and reasonable (in the conventional sense) people have been wrong about moral truths. We could add many more sources to that discussion, including misunderstanding, confusion, oversight, unarticulated assumptions, fallacies, forgetfulness, and more (Huemer, 2005). As Huemer argues “given the multitude of ways human beings can go wrong, why do anti-realists think that moral disagreement must be explained by a shortage of objective facts?” (Huemer, 2005, 139). This is not a positive argument for the belief that there will be convergence if we morally deliberated under ideal conditions. However, this should give us reason to be suspicious of someone who argues that convergence around a family of reasonable views under ideal conditions is impossible.

7. 4 - Does Philosophy Need History?

Before I discuss this question, I would like to make a few disclaimers. I am not saying that a philosopher should never engage with the history of the concepts that they use, nor am I suggesting that there is nothing to be gained in engaging with the history. I think a lot of valuable insights can be gained from understanding the history of our concepts. Williams tells this story of an “American philosopher who stuck on his office door the notice ‘Just say NO to the history of philosophy’” and I certainly do not share the sentiment of that American philosopher (Williams, 2014, 405). It would be implausible to believe there is no history behind most of our political concepts. Rawls certainly recognises the many ways in which the word ‘Freedom’ is used by different philosophers throughout his lecture in the history of political philosophy. Even Cohen, who agrees with Plato when it comes to fundamental principles such as Justice, understands that the term justice has been used differently throughout history.

The question is whether we **need** to engage in historical understanding in order to engage in normative theorising. We can start with the use of intuitions. We know that a

lot of things we find intuitive today, people did not find intuitive before. A lot of our intuitions seem to be, in Williams's words 'just there', in the sense that we have moral and political convictions that we did not choose. Some of our intuitions, in other words, might be ideological. However, I think most people would find it implausible that we simply take our intuitions for granted, or that we should only look to our moral intuitions when engaging in moral theorising. We can use the method of reflective equilibrium as an example, which some moral philosophers regard as the 'only game in town'. When engaging in reflective equilibrium, we don't just start with any intuition we might have, if by intuition we mean some kind of gut reaction without any thought. It would be more accurate to say that moral and political philosophers start with considered judgments, which mean we only think about judgments about particular cases that are not products of distorting influences. For example, if we started moral theorising in a very angry mood, or very drunk, we might think that our intuitions in these cases might not be the most reliable for our purpose of finding the right answer. Most moral theorists do not necessarily start the process by taking any intuition they have for granted. Furthermore, most moral theorists would not provide ultimately authority to our intuitions. As McMahan explains "While our intuitions do seem to have a certain initial credibility, it seems exorbitant to suppose that they are self-evident or self-justifying. They seem at most to have an evidentiary status. We recoil from the suggestion (advanced, as I noted earlier, by various traditional intuitionists) that intuitions are the unshakable basis on which all moral knowledge rests" (McMahan, 2013, 111). This might still not be enough. There are still arguments that can be made to challenge the validity or desirability of the method of reflective equilibrium. Whilst I am unsympathetic to these arguments, my point here is that few people would simply take what they feel in certain cases for granted, without thinking about them. The way that political realists, particularly Geuss, portray the use of intuitions, seems uncharitable.

We can say something similar about our concepts. I think most sensible people will accept that our moral and political concepts have a history. The important issue of disagreement here is what follows from this fact. There are several things political realists might say. The first is that if we aren't aware of the history of a concept, we might fail to be critical of the concepts we have inherited. Secondly, if we neglect the history of our concepts, we might forget that some conceptions of a concept are

‘calamitously unsuited’ for the modern world. Finally, the meanings of concepts are ‘unstable’ because their meanings are “constantly drifting and realigning”, and there is something problematic about political moralists trying to ‘lock’ the meaning of these concepts for eternity. I believe the arguments I have made about intuitions should be sufficient for the first issue. History might help us be critical about our concepts. However, philosophers rarely use concepts without thinking carefully about them. I also presume that, given the complexity of history, there are many interesting historical narratives that can be given for a particular concept, and it is not clear why having all those historical narratives is something that a political philosopher needs to have when engaging in normative theorising. Finally, when it comes to the fact that some concepts are ‘calamitously unsuited’ to our modern world, I have already provided a response in chapter 5, where I explain Williams’s and Slat’s discussion of Saint-Just’s illusion. As a quick reminder, Saint-Just held an ancient conception of liberty, and when he tried to apply it to France after the French Revolution, he made the mistake of thinking that Roman republicanism belonged to “the space of our actual social and political life”, which lead to catastrophic events. I said in chapter 5, that this illusion can be better explained by stating that Saint-Just had an ideal theory of Roman republicanism and made the mistake of pursuing that idea of republican liberty without thinking about the consequences (or believing that any consequences were acceptable for the pursuit of the ideal). History gives us many lessons of the tragedies of political actors who pursued their own conception of utopia and thought that breaking eggs was necessary to make their desired omelette. However, this is not a lesson that requires historical knowledge of the concepts that we use. We can use normative lessons as well. Finally, it is true that the definition of concepts has been unstable in the past. However, when a philosopher tries to provide what they consider to be the best definition of liberty, they are trying to do so from a normative viewpoint. This might involve starting with how most people use the term liberty, but it does not stop there. If someone argues that the best interpretation of political liberty is non-interference no matter what, moralists might respond by saying that this is a poor definition of liberty because it fails to show what is valuable about it. As Berlin argued, “liberty for the wolves has often meant death to the sheep” (Berlin, 1969, xlv).

Ultimately, the main reason why political realists believe philosophy needs history is that they do not believe that moral and political philosophy is identifying any normative

truths because they are sceptical of normative truths. If they are not pointing towards mind-independent normative facts, they must be pointing at something else, and it is the job of the historian to try and understand what they might be and how these convictions emerged. As stated before, I believe that we can learn a lot from history. However, this is not the same as saying that philosophy needs history.

7. 5 - Arguments outside the Scope of this Thesis

This thesis is not an argument about metaethics. I have done my best to decipher the metaethical and metaphysical claims that political realists (mostly) implicitly rely on and discuss them. Given the amount of work that Bernard Williams has done alone in the field of ethics and metaethics, it is impossible for me to discuss all the relevant metaethical and metaphysical issues that political realists implicitly rely on. For this reason, I focused on historicist scepticism, because it plays a foundational role in the political realist critique. It is this argument that provides the strongest claim for why engaging in normative political theory as moralists have is problematic, and why the only way to engage in normative theorising about politics is the way that political realists advocate. It is also, I believe, an argument that unites almost all political realists. However, there are other metaethical views that are relevant. The aim of this section is to quickly go through one of the main metaethical views that I have excluded, along with an explanation of why I have excluded it.

The main disagreement I have excluded from the scope of this thesis is the debate between internal and external reasons. Bernard Williams was famously an internalist about reasons and did not believe that external reasons existed. When someone says that ‘A has a reason to Φ ’, for an internalist, it means that A has a reason only because A has a desire that can be satisfied by Φ -ing (Williams, 1981, 101). Williams’s internalism is a bit more sophisticated, in the sense that someone has a reason if and only if there is a sound deliberative route between the action and the agents subjective motivational set (Scanlon, 1998, 364). Williams is quite broad in his definition of a subjective motivational set. It includes desires, along with “dispositions of evaluation, patterns of emotional reaction, personal loyalties, and various projects, as they may be abstractly called, embodying commitments of the agent” (Williams, 1981, 105).

There are at least two reasons for why I excluded the discussion of internalism versus externalism about reasons. The main reason is because I believe, it is still historicism that is doing most of the work in the metaethical and metaphysical arguments made by political realists. For example, to put it simplistically, agents only have a reason to do something if it satisfies a desire or a commitment that they have. Political realists argue that what we desire, what types of commitments we have, and what we find valuable, are ultimately the product of historical accident. It was valuable to be a warrior in a feudalistic society. We no longer live in a feudalistic society, so it is not valuable to live a warrior life style. We used to have certain desires in feudalistic and religious societies. Given the modern and disenchanted world we live in, we no longer have those desires, and instead have a new set of desires. As I described earlier, Williams wants philosophers to question why so many of their commitments are 'simply there'. Only a historical story will explain why this is the case. It is for this reason that we cannot play Kant in the Court of King Arthur. We cannot tell Louis XIV that he had reason to be a liberal and implement a liberal regime. Due to his historical context, he would have found those desires unintelligible, or at the very least he would not have had those desires, and therefore, according to internalists, we would be wrong to say that he had a reason to do so.

The second (not as important) reason I have excluded this discussion is that, as I stated, I think there are good positive reasons to believe that reasons are irreducibly normative. Given that certain normative concepts, such as reasons, are irreducibly normative (or primitive to use Scanlon's term), I believe it is implausible to believe that there are no such things as external reasons. If there are normative truths, it would then be strange to say that "we cannot claim that there are some things that it would be wrong for anyone to do. We cannot even claim that it would be wrong for anyone to torture other people for his own amusement. Given some sadist's motivations, this many may have no internal reason to act differently" (Parfit, 2011, 442). Given what moral realist like Scanlon, Parfit, Dworkin and Larmore believe, it would be strange for them to say that there are no such things as external reasons. I say this reason is not as important because the aim of this thesis was not to say that the historicist scepticism of political realism is wrong because moral realism is correct. Other metaethical positions can accept that historicist scepticism is wrong, and I want to ensure that my arguments are ecumenical.

7. 6 – Conclusion

This was a long and complicated chapter that is quite disconnected from a lot of the analysis provided in the previous chapters. However, the ultimate goal of the chapter is quite straight forward. Political realists (mostly implicitly but sometimes explicitly) make an argument that, if true, would mean that we could only theorise about politics in the way that political realists advocate. Theorising about justice would simply be a form of ideology and would make us repackage our own parochial viewpoints as universal truths. However, they ultimately try to undermine a moral justification with an explanation, which is not possible. The origins of our beliefs and the justification of our beliefs are two different tasks. A story of the origins of our beliefs might (at best) make us feel a little embarrassed about our beliefs. However, if we have strong justifications for our beliefs, the origin story is not enough to undermine the truth of those beliefs.

I started by providing an account of why political realists hold a historicist scepticism about universal and categorical moral claims. Our moral and political convictions are the outcome of historical accidents. If history had gone a different way, if someone else had won the battle (in Skinner and Geuss's terms), we would have had very different convictions. Political realists believe there is no Archimedean Point from which we can validate these moral convictions that we hold. If this is true, how could we say that our moral solution to politics is true? How did everyone in the past, who were not liberals, fail to see the truth? What makes us so arrogant to believe that we have the right answer, and that in the future, we won't look at our liberal views as being primitive? I then showed what impact this has on political realism as a methodology in political theory. In previous chapters, I stated that we can only fully understand why Williams believed we needed to see legitimacy in the way that he did when we understand the metaethical and metaphysical views of political realists. I finally provided that account and showed how we can provide a more comprehensive justification for why political realists believe their conception of legitimacy is superior to the moralist universalist alternative.

There were a lot of responses I provided to these metaethical and metaphysical claims. I started by pointing out a tension between the political realists political views and metaethical views. Rawls knows that controversial metaethical arguments can generate political disagreement, which is why he avoids relying on controversial claims. Political

realists argue that Rawls does not acknowledge disagreement enough, and that in order to manage disagreement, you have to theorise about politics and legitimacy in the way that they do. However, to fully justify why we should theorise about politics and legitimacy in the way that they do, we need to rely on extremely controversial metaethical and metaphysical views.

I then showed how liberal universalists could provide an error theory for their political convictions. If the only reasons liberals had for why people were not liberals before liberalism was that they were wicked or stupid, I would agree with Williams that there is something strange about that answer. However, regardless of the accuracy of Tsai's analysis, I believe it is possible to provide an error theory for liberalism without relying on the fact that people were wicked or stupid. The main section of this chapter rejected some of the implications of historical contingency. I started by providing some positive metaethical arguments, namely that there are irreducibly normative truths. To discuss morality, we have to be within the domain of morality, and cannot ask for an Archimedean Point for our moral views.

Finally, I showed how we can reject the scepticism that comes from the fact that our moral convictions are the product of a particular history by showing how political realists are trying to undermine moral justifications with an explanation for how we obtained our convictions. We can all accept that our moral convictions are the outcome of a particular history. However, this argument alone cannot be used to undermine a moral justification. The attempt to undermine the validity of a moral justification merely by looking at its origins is committing a form of genetic fallacy. I concluded with a section on a topic that was excluded from the scope of this thesis, namely the discussion of internalism versus externalism about reasons.

Conclusion

The proper relationship between political theory and political practice has been subject to debate for centuries. It would be foolish of me to believe that my thesis will somehow end this debate. However, I hope that this thesis has given good reason to believe that the disagreement between political realists and moralists is not as stark as it might seem.

One of the main themes that ran through this thesis was the importance of charity and analytical rigour. I will start by discussing the importance of charity. I believe almost every chapter had a section where I had to show how a political realist provided an uncharitable interpretation of what a political moralist said (or would say). The uncharitable nature of certain interpretations makes the political realist position *prima facie* more attractive. How could it be possible that moralists believe that all forms of managing political disagreement can be replaced with philosophical discussion? How could moralists be so naïve as to believe that we can achieve an overlapping consensus on liberal principles when the world consists of radical disagreement and not just reasonable pluralism? The political realist position gains adherents based on uncharitable interpretations of their targets of critique, which make their own position much more intuitive. However, in the grand scheme of things, I believe this lack of charity undermines the important contribution that political realism can make. It makes the political realist position difficult to take seriously.

Some of these are simple mistakes. For example, political realists will consistently cite Rawls's claim that justice is the first virtue of institutions (Galston, 2010 and Sleat, 2018). This claim allows them to say things such as “the first virtue of politics is order, not justice, and justice purchased at the expense of order is likely to prove self-defeating” or that “the focus of contemporary political theory has been aimed in the *wrong* directions ... political theory needs to turn its attention back to the *sine quibus non* of politics – order, stability, security, and the conditions of cooperation” (Galston, 2010, 388 and Sleat, 2018, 4). However, in the very next page of *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls states that these statements of our intuitive conviction of the primacy of justice are “no doubt ... expressed too strongly” (*TJ*, 4). Some of these ‘mistakes’ seem to be malicious. A lot of Geuss's arguments against political moralists can be considered in this way. I have discussed quite a few of these claims throughout the thesis, and I will not repeat them here. Rhetorically Geuss's arguments might be interesting. However, his claims have

the potential to be a huge disservice to the field of contemporary political theory. Imagine a student who reads Geuss before they read Rawls (Geuss's book is much smaller and easier to read, so I presume this scenario is not very unrealistic). They would leave with the impression that much of contemporary political theory is (at best) deeply mistaken, and (at worst) actively working to maintain the domination and oppression we see in today's society. I suspect this student will have little motivation to then take seriously the many things that contemporary political theory has to offer. This would be a serious loss.

The other important issue is analytical rigour. I believe there will be many things that political realists will say about the several chapters I have in this thesis interpreting political realism. They might say that I have misunderstood the idea of a normativity internal to politics. They can argue that either my ethic of responsibility is either wrong, incomplete, or unoriginal. They might argue that my attempt to undermine the political realist critique by stating that they are committing a genetic fallacy is an uncharitable interpretation of their metaethical and metaphysical views. Perhaps they would be right. However, I would hope that political realists would be forgiving because, in the process of writing this thesis, I had to do a lot of reconstructive work of what political realists are arguing in order to engage in critical analysis. Political realists (at times) tend to conflate things or make profound claims, either without much evidence or without a clear account of what we should learn from that profundity.

A good example of this is the Basic Legitimation Demand, and the idea that we should think of legitimacy in this way, rather than in a moralistic universalistic fashion. Political realists give two different explanations for why we should think of legitimacy in terms of the Basic Legitimation Demand, one of which is political, the other metaethical/metaphysical. However, when reading much introductory literature on political realism, political realists put these justifications together and argue that moralism is problematic because they do not see legitimacy in a historically contextual way. As I mentioned in the introduction, one of the main contributions of this thesis has been to try and systematically analyse political realism and the political realist critique. This involved carefully separating the many arguments that political realists make and seeing what the best justification for these arguments could be. In this process, I will inevitably have made a few mistakes, mistakes that political realists will

point to in their response. However, I would ask political realists to help me see where I went wrong, by being careful and clear with their arguments. It would be great to see specific examples of whom they are arguing against, along with a charitable account of what they would say in response to some of the more extreme claims that have been made by political realists in the past. A good way of being clearer, more analytically rigorous, and more charitable, would be to avoid making generalisations of the field of political theory as a whole. Even the best philosophers will be unable to make accurate and non-trivial generalisations of a field as diverse as political theory. It might be more conducive to the political realist cause if there were more specific claims made about specific works by philosophers. It might undermine the generality of the political realist critique. However, the gain in credibility will be more than enough compensation.

It might be true that some moral and political philosophers did believe some of the things that political realists say moralists believe. We might look back at some of the optimists in the Enlightenment, who believed that the power of reason would eventually remove superstitions and delusions that prevented us from seeing the truth. I think there is a reason why, when political realists describe whom they are arguing against, they tend to use labels like Kantians, or Neo-Kantians (Geuss, 2008). They presume that contemporary political theorists theorise about politics in the same way that optimists in the Enlightenment era did. There are at least two debates that can be had here. The first is whether or not this is an accurate interpretation of some of these historical figures. Political realists are quick to cite Kant and his argument that “All politics must bend its knee before the right” (Galston, 2010, 387). However, theorists such as Nardin claim that this is too quick and simplistic of an interpretation of Kant, that political realists “could draw on [Kant’s] insights to strengthen their own account of the autonomy of politics” (Nardin, 2017, 314). While I did engage in some historical exegesis, this was not the main strategy taken by my thesis. I suspect that there is much work that can be done here in the future for those who are more inclined to discuss historical figures of political thought. As mentioned in previous chapters, Aristotelians and Kantians believe that Williams did not have the best interpretation of Aristotle and Kant (Nussbaum, 1995). Providing more accurate interpretations of these thinkers might provide a good basis for pushing political realists to either (a) accept that some of their claims about metaethics are wrong or (b) that their critique is not as easily applicable to as many theorists as they might have initially hoped.

I aimed to engage in the second debate, which is to engage in normative theorising in a way that I believe a lot of contemporary political moralists would. It might be true that their critique applies quite easily to theorists such as Kant or Plato. However, as I believe I have shown in this thesis, it either does not apply to work done by moralists or if it does apply, it does not have the same undermining effect that political realists believe it has. Political moralists are either engaging in a different task/asking a different question or do not/would not say some of the things that political realists say. No one would sensibly reject the ethic of responsibility. Deontological theories of morality are much more sophisticated today. More careful work needs to be done to see what they would say if they were trying to answer the same questions that political realists find interesting.

I am sympathetic to the claim that political philosophy (as a field today) has been too focused on developing ideal theories of justice. If you look at many political theorists throughout history, they continue to be relevant for many theorists and practitioners in economics, sociology, and political science. Theorists like, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau spoke to many issues that we can still relate to, such as the problem of establishing order, how human beings actually are, what motivates people, etc. Political realists look at this role that political theory used to play and see the excessive specialisation of political theory today as problematic. I think the 'Manichean Dualism of Soul and Body' between political science and political theory that Williams found so problematic probably has some truth within it. However, this is not the same as saying that moralistic political philosophy is somehow wrong, inappropriate, or defective. More argument needs to be provided to develop this argument.

Finally, I believe the last chapter has shown that political realism relies on Williams's work on ethics and metaethics. Bernard Williams was an extremely original and thoughtful philosopher. He started many debates and coined many terms that we continue to use today, including moral luck, internalism and externalism about reasons, the plurality of value, and his work on integrity and moral philosophy. However, because of his originality and his profundity, much work in moral and ethical philosophy has been done to respond to many of his claims. Political realists cannot simply rely on Williams's work to achieve the results they want to achieve. For lack of a better word, they need to 'update' their metaethical and metaphysical views. This is not to say that updating their views will mean that they should be moral realists. New work is being

done today that claims to show how all moral judgments are false (Streumer, 2017). Evolutionary debunking has become a new and interesting development in the field of metaethics, which might be an interesting basis for political realists to make similar arguments to those that they have been making (Vavova, 2015 and Wielenberg, 2016). I myself am unsympathetic to these arguments and believe that they are unlikely to succeed. However, the point still stands. Metaethics and metaphysical debates have moved on from Williams's starting points of discussion. It would be good for political realists to either (a) develop new Williamsian responses to these arguments or (b) pursue these other developing trends in metaethics to help them develop their critique against moralistic political philosophy.

Ultimately, I believe that there is more agreement than disagreement between political realists and moralists. There is room for both positions in the methodological debates of contemporary political theory. Some political realists might argue that this is a problem for political realism. I do not believe this is the case. Acknowledging this can have a positive impact on the political realist position. It would allow political realists to stop emphasising the critique and spend more time constructing a fruitful, clear, and interesting position. By developing an account of how political realists interpret the political landscape and creating an interesting account of political ethics, this might inspire more political theorists to take up the cause. This, I believe, should be the true goal of political realists in the future, inspiration rather than critique.

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Abbreviated Citations

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