

# Legitimacy in Realist Thought: Between Moralism and *Realpolitik*

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## Abstract

What, if anything, can realism say about the normative conditions of political legitimacy? Must a realist political theory accept that the ability to successfully employ coercive power is equivalent to the right to rule, or can it incorporate normative criteria for legitimacy but without collapsing into a form of moralism? While several critics argue that realism fails to adequately differentiate itself from moralism or that it cannot coherently appeal to normative values so as to distinguish might from right, this article seeks to help develop a realist account of legitimacy by demonstrating how it can successfully and stably occupy this position between moralism and *Realpolitik*. Through this discussion, however, the article also argues that political rule necessitates the use of coercive power which is (at best) imperfectly legitimated, and that this blurs the distinction between politics and successful domination which lies at the heart of many recent accounts of political realism. In at least this sense, realism retains important and under-acknowledged affinities to *Realpolitik*.

## Keywords

realism, legitimacy, moralism, *Realpolitik*, coercion

## Introduction

If justice was the primary concept of the liberal philosophy that has dominated Anglo-American political theory for the past few decades, then the

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central concept of the recent resurgence of interest in realist political thought might be legitimacy. This change of focus reflects the fact that realists recognise how individuals disagree just as much about the most fundamental normative questions of politics, such as the just principles of distribution, the limits of freedom and toleration, and so on, as they do moral or religious matters. In such a context of disagreement, the first question of politics shifts to how *any* set of principles or terms can legitimately regulate our shared political association, that is to say have authority over those subject to them. The standard liberal answer to this question is deeply unsatisfactory, realists claim, insofar as it justifies legitimacy with reference to a consensus on political principles, either actual or hypothetical, that is profoundly at odds with the conditions of disagreement in which politics takes place (what Jeremy Waldron has called the “circumstances of politics”).<sup>1</sup> In seeking to develop more realistic criteria for legitimacy, contemporary realism has sought to situate itself between two alternative positions. The first is a form of political moralism which derives the conditions of legitimacy from moral values and principles that are external to and have antecedent authority over the political sphere. Realism, in contrast, wants to give greater autonomy to politics (from morality, economics, etc.) as a discrete sphere of human activity. In doing this, however, it must avoid making politics a fully amoral sphere in which moral judgements and values have no place because that would undercut the possibility of differentiating politics from violence which is required to keep distance between realism and *Realpolitik*, by which I mean the reduction of politics to violence by making the *de jure* right to rule equivalent to the *de facto* ability to do so. “Might is right,” as the famous slogan goes. Realism attempts to distance itself from *Realpolitik* by accepting the centrality of power to politics without reducing politics to power. Its strategy for doing this is to insist that there are normative conditions for legitimacy that distinguish politics from successful domination, though these are not universal but more specific and contextual in both their origin and normativity. Yet in appealing to these normative conditions, realism must avoid collapsing into a form of political moralism. So legitimacy cannot simply depend on the ability to rule, but neither can it be derived from moral conditions that are external to the political. An important question for realist political thought, therefore, is whether it is possible to develop a stable and compelling theory of legitimacy that occupies this ground between *Realpolitik* and moralism.

Many critics of realism have contested the plausibility of such a theory, arguing that the inclusion of moral conditions for legitimacy ensures that realism collapses into moralism or that the attempt to distinguish the two results in a form of amoral *Realpolitik*. The central aim of this essay is to help develop a particular version of a realist theory of legitimacy,<sup>2</sup> and in doing so

draw attention to some of the ways in which it represents a more plausible and credible way of thinking about legitimating political power than the moralism or idealism that it seeks to respond to.<sup>3</sup> It will do this through the question of whether realism can plausibly and consistently occupy this position between moralism and *Realpolitik*, focusing on the conditions under which the demand for legitimation arises, the extent to which the political is autonomous from the moral, and how a realist theory can incorporate (nonuniversal) conditions of legitimacy. Throughout, my argument will be that, despite some recent criticisms, this position is both available to realism and a likely fruitful basis upon which to develop a realist alternative. However, through this engagement with moralism and *Realpolitik*, this article also aims to highlight the inevitability of what I take to be a necessary and hitherto under-acknowledged limitation of political realism, that political rule demands or requires the use of coercive power that is (at best) imperfectly legitimated. This inherent limitation to realist legitimacy has several important ramifications for the future development of political realism, most notably in blurring the distinction between politics and successful domination that has been at the heart of several contemporary influential accounts, and in drawing attention to how judgements regarding legitimacy remain part of the contest of politics and so cannot fully escape the relations of power that stand in need of justification. In the end, while realism is far from synonymous with *Realpolitik*, recognising these limits should remind us of the centrality of power to politics and the deep moral difficulties imbued in political rule.

## Realism and Moralism

The two texts that have done most to bolster interest in realist thought, Bernard Williams's *In the Beginning Was the Deed* and Raymond Geuss's *Philosophy and Real Politics*, present realism as an alternative to political moralism or an "ethics-first" view of political theory.<sup>4</sup> For both, moralism is a theory that makes "the moral prior to the political" or that takes politics to be "a kind of applied ethics," in the sense that "morality offers constraints . . . on what politics can rightfully do" or insofar as moral values or ideals provide the sole or principal guide for political action. Realism, in contrast, "gives a greater autonomy to distinctively political thought" or "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 the way the social, economic, political, etc., institutions actually operate in some society at some given time, and what really does move human beings to act in given circumstances."<sup>5</sup> Realism is offered by Williams and Geuss, as by many other of a

similar realist ilk, as an alternative to the liberal moralism which they believe has dominated political theory for the past four decades.

That realism is presented as an alternative to moralism has meant that one of the points of contestation in the contemporary debate has been how we should understand the nature of the difference between them. One increasingly prevalent way of drawing this distinction has been to take realism as endeavouring to legitimate the political order without reference to moral values, and focusing specifically on the justificatory resources that are internal to politics, whereas moralism appeals to normative values that are external to the political sphere and are taken to have antecedent authority over it. The most recent and explicit argument that has drawn the distinction in this way can be found in Charles Larmore's "What Is Political Philosophy?" Realist political thought rightly starts, Larmore believes, from the assumption that individuals reasonably disagree not only about issues surrounding morality or religion but about political matters also. Justice, freedom, rights, equality, and so on, are no less contentious and complex subjects than the nature of the good life. The consequence of this for political theory is that it cannot begin, as realists charge moralists of doing, from the premise of consensus on either the right or the good. Nor can political theory simply be applied moral philosophy in the sense that its content is solely that of applying those principles or values that are the subject of agreement in practice. As Larmore puts it, "The moral ideals to which the latter view [moralism] appeals are bound to prove controversial, forming part of the problems of political life, rather than providing the basis of their solution."<sup>6</sup> Politics, and hence political theory, is a more autonomous sphere than moralism appreciates because it deals with a domain that is shaped by deep disagreements and conflicts.<sup>7</sup>

Up to this point Larmore is in broad agreement with realism and its critique of political moralism. The difficulty for Larmore comes at the following stage of the realists' argument regarding authority and legitimacy. In the face of permanent and ineradicable disagreement, realists argue that the Hobbesian question of the institution of a legitimate political authority which is able to make coercively enforceable decisions on behalf of those over whom it rules becomes the paramount concern. But this picture of political society and its accompanying idea of political theory is "incomplete in a crucial regard," he argues, because it is unclear how we can provide a legitimation of that authority "without justifying its rules, or its power to make them, by appeal to principles of justice it must present as having a validity independent of the political order itself."<sup>8</sup> Not only does Larmore doubt that realism can avoid making such appeals to resources external to the political, but he also believes that such justifications will unavoidably take their "bearings from elements of morality."<sup>9</sup>

In order to demonstrate this, Larmore focuses on Williams's picture of political society.<sup>10</sup> Williams identified "the 'first' political question in Hobbesian terms as the securing of order, protection, safety, trust and the conditions of co-operation."<sup>11</sup> No state can answer the first question, however, without satisfying the "basic legitimation demand" (BLD) which requires that the state "offer a justification of its power to each subject."<sup>12</sup> This justification need not necessarily take the specific form that it does in the modern liberal world. While today, now and around here as Williams often put it, we take the conditions of legitimacy to include that each person can accept the justification "in the light of an understanding of himself and others as free and equal members of that society," in other places and at other times different terms of justifications have been preferred that do not rely on this (or maybe even any) moral conception of the person.<sup>13</sup> The point is that the state must be able to offer a justification of its power to each of its subjects so that they have a reason to recognise it as an authority to which they owe obedience (and obey for reasons other than its coercive capacity to ensure compliance). Where such legitimation demands have not been met, those individuals are not a member of the political society but what Williams called "enemies," people over whom the state has the power to rule but not the right.

When Williams asks himself whether the BLD is itself a moral principle, he replies that "if it is, it does not represent a morality that is prior to politics. It is a claim that is inherent in there being such a thing as politics."<sup>14</sup> Larmore believes this to be unsatisfactory:

It is not so much the BLD as rather the justification of state power, whatever it may be, in which satisfying the BLD is taken to consist, that must express a "morality prior to politics": it has to embody an ideal of what constitutes a just political order—specifically, an idea of what constitutes the just exercise of coercive power—and that is not only a moral conception but one whose validity must be understood as antecedent to the state's own authority by virtue of serving to ground it.<sup>15</sup>

While Larmore recognises Williams' insistence that the conditions which will satisfy the BLD will be heavily historically and socially contextual, nevertheless in modernity this condition will include the conviction that "political rule is legitimate only if those whom it is to bind, understanding one another as free and equal citizens, can see reason to endorse the fundamental rules by which it operates."<sup>16</sup> This is not only manifestly a moral principle that defines the grounds on which the state justifies its authority and legitimacy but one that Larmore claims constitutes a morality prior to politics.<sup>17</sup> So though political realism rightly starts political theorising from the fact of

disagreement about the right as much as the good, and therefore spurns any notion of a pre-political consensus which provides the normative guidance for legitimate political action or authority, it wrongly assumes that the question of what legitimates coercive power can be answered without appealing not only to moral values but to moral values that have antecedent normative authority over politics.

The first question to ask here is whether Williams himself would have disagreed that judgements regarding legitimacy require us to appeal to moral values. It is not clear that he would. Certainly nowhere does he suggest that the BLD can or could be answered without appeal to any moral values or principles. Rather Williams is quite clear that inasmuch as liberalism provides an acceptable answer to the BLD, it will employ justifications “in terms of an ethically elaborated account of the person as having more sophisticated interests, which may involve, for instance, a notion of autonomy. This account might be, or approximate to, a liberal conception of the person.”<sup>18</sup> It may be that moral reasons are not the only justifications we need to draw upon to legitimate power; economic or efficiency considerations, for example, might be relevant also. But Williams’s realism explicitly does not rule out appeals to moral values in responding to the BLD. Furthermore, Larmore overlooks an important aspect of Williams’s account of legitimation: that any form of political order must *make sense* as a form of political authority, where what makes sense to us is a form of historical and cultural understanding that will involve “first-order discussions about our political, *moral*, social, interpretive, and other concepts.”<sup>19</sup> So, far from seeking to exclude moral consideration from our judgements about political legitimacy, Williams saw that they have a crucial role to play in helping us recognise the difference between political rule and mere domination.

It is Larmore’s claim that the appeal to moral values ensures that such justifications represent a morality that is prior to politics which is potentially more troubling, for, if true, this would break down the distinction between realism and moralism. It is here that we meet a deep but increasingly familiar misunderstanding of realism, one that misconstrues the relationship between morality and politics in realist thought and the nature of the demand for legitimation itself, in particular the question of whether it is best understood as a political or a moral demand.

In order to see this, let us return to Williams’s Basic Legitimation Demand. Williams stated that a sufficient condition for a BLD arising is when “A coerces B and claims that B would be wrong to fight back: resents it, forbids it, rallies others to oppose it as wrong, and so on.”<sup>20</sup> Crucially, for a genuine demand for legitimation to arise, A (usually the state or agents of the state) must claim not that their overwhelming power gives them the ability to rule

but that they have the right to do so. This follows from the axiom that lies at the heart of contemporary political realism that “might does not equal right.”<sup>21</sup> There is a vital difference between political rule (rule through legitimate power) and successful domination (rule through un-legitimated coercion).<sup>22</sup> Politics is not simply the subjection through force of one group by another. It implies that there is a relationship of authority in which those who wield the coercive power have and are recognised as having the right to rule, to be legitimate, by those who are ruled by them. So those who claim to have the right to rule, and who are able to offer a sufficient and appropriate legitimisation story, are ruling politically—they represent a legitimate political authority. Those who simply rule through coercive power and either make no claim to have any right to do so, or make such a claim but cannot offer a sufficient answer to the BLD, are simply dominating (and are not ruling politically).

The demand for legitimation arises from within the political because it is “a claim that is inherent in there being such a thing as politics.”<sup>23</sup> This demand is present in all political situations because politics implies that one has the right to rule rather than merely the coercive ability to do so. While the conditions for satisfying the BLD might require us to appeal to a whole host of contextual considerations, some of them moral in nature, the demand itself arises from within the political sphere. It is, properly speaking, a political question—indeed the first political question—because it is a question that determines whether an order is a form of political rule or not. So while, for example, the liberal conception of the person, which makes several universal claims as to the permanent interests of human beings (such as the notion of autonomy), can be drawn upon to justify particular features of the liberal state, it cannot be what generates the demand for legitimation in the first place.<sup>24</sup>

The nature of the demand for legitimation looks different from the perspective of moralism. As political liberalism is identified as a form of moralism by Williams, and as Larmore is himself a prominent advocate of this particular theory, focusing our attention here in order to examine this issue would seem appropriate. At the heart of political liberalism is its well-known principle of legitimacy. As Rawls put it, “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 light of principles and ideals acceptable to their common human reason. This is the liberal principle of legitimacy.”<sup>25</sup> Larmore has argued that Rawls was unclear as to why it should be the case that the validity of political principles should depend upon them being reasonably acceptable, often implying that the authority of the liberal principle of legitimacy derived from the fact that it enjoyed widespread endorsement (either directly or indirectly

via the pervasive commitment to reciprocity). But the only plausible answer, Larmore believes, is if we understand this claim as deriving from a more basic or fundamental moral principle regarding respect for persons. While the use of force is not in itself wrong, “What we must regard as improper is . . . to seek compliance by force alone, without requiring reasonable agreement about the rules to be enforced. For consider the basic fact that persons are beings capable of thinking and acting on the basis of reasons. If we try to bring about conformity to a rule of conduct solely by the threat of force, we shall be treating persons merely as means, as objects of coercion, and not also as ends, engaging directly their distinctive capacity as persons.”<sup>26</sup> What is wrong with rule by force alone is that it fails to respect the persons over whom the coercion is employed.

The demand for the legitimation of coercive force is a moral demand in two important senses. First of all, it is clearly a demand that we make an explicitly moral judgement regarding the permissible uses of power in relation to expressly moral criteria. Indeed the very purpose of legitimacy as a concept is to determine morally permissible (legitimate) and morally impermissible (illegitimate) uses of power according to normative conditions that are external to politics. Secondly, and more fundamentally for our purposes, moralism assumes that the relationship between morality and politics is such that the normative requirement that power be legitimated is a moral stipulation demanded of it from outside of the political sphere.<sup>27</sup> In political moralism, the legitimation demand arises not from features internal to politics itself, as is the case in realism where the very nature of political rule requires that the demand has been sufficiently met, but from extra-political moral considerations. Not only, therefore, is the demand for legitimation moral in that it requires a response according to moral conditions of co-existence that determine morally acceptable and unacceptable uses of power (a point which, as we saw above, realism can share), but also insofar as *the very imperative to provide a legitimation in the first place derives directly from moral conditions that have antecedent authority over the political (in virtue of the fact that politics must provide a sufficient response to it)*.<sup>28</sup> So in the specific case of political liberalism, for instance, “the basic fact” that persons are to be treated as ends in themselves provides this extra-political moral value that both necessitates legitimating coercive force and grounds the specific principles against which the legitimacy of the use of power is to be assessed. It is because it is antecedently morally wrong to employ coercive power in a manner that does not respect the freedom and equality of those persons subject to it that we are required to both provide a legitimation of that power and that the liberal principle of legitimacy entails the specific form of public justification that it does.



Identifying this difference between realism and moralism helps us clarify the nature of the claim that moralism prioritises morality over politics, and in doing so see where Larmore's criticism goes astray. Moralism, as we have seen, understands the demand for legitimation to arise because a certain set of moral considerations have antecedent authority over politics and hence place pre-political stipulations on the rightful employment of political power. Importantly, because the distinction between politics and successful domination turns on whether the legitimation demand is met or not, these (pre-political) moral values and their stipulations effectively demarcate the sphere of politics. The limits, nature and content of the political are determined in moralism by whichever moral principles we take to have antecedent authority in this regard, and in this sense morality can be thought of as having some form of conceptual or normative priority over politics. Hence, realists have regularly criticised political liberalism, for example, on the grounds that it reduces the political to a sphere in which persons act only in accordance with principles they all accept. This seems to turn politics into a realm of implausibly harmonious moral and political consensus and exclude much of the disagreement and conflict that seems to characterise politics, including fundamental disagreements about constitutional essentials, conceptions of justice and even the nature and limits of politics itself.<sup>29</sup> Politics is better conceived, on the realist view, as taking place in conditions of deep and intractable moral, political and religious disagreement and as providing the means for us to live together collectively in such conditions. We need politics precisely because we disagree about morality (amongst so much else). Such a view would be obscured if we take the logical space of politics to be exhausted by morality.

Realism, on the other hand, assumes that the demand for legitimation arises simply because power is not self-justifying, meaning there is a crucial difference between political rule and successful domination. The demand is generated from within politics itself because it has to be met if a particular coercive relationship is to be deemed an instance of political rule at all. It is therefore first and foremost a political rather than moral question whether a regime is legitimate or not.<sup>30</sup> By insisting that the demand for legitimation arises from within the political rather than moral domain, realist theory can draw upon moral considerations when making judgements regarding legitimacy without having to assume that morality has antecedent authority over politics (the point that Larmore's analysis overlooks). And, crucially, those moral considerations do not determine the limits, nature and content of the political sphere. Politics has an identity distinct from morality; hence moral, values, considerations and principles are part of politics but they are not constitutive of it. In this way, while contemporary realism has not sought to completely sever the connection between politics and morality, it can "give

*greater* autonomy to distinctively political thought.”<sup>31</sup> And at least part of how it has sought to create this distance is by conceptualising the demand for legitimacy as arising from within the political rather than moral sphere, while allowing for the idea that the conditions for fulfilling that demand will be given by a whole host of external considerations (including moral ones). This means that though morality will inevitably have an important role to play in determining the content and character of politics, it does ensure that the political retains some autonomy from the moral.

Understanding the distinction between realism and moralism as turning at least partially on this difference regarding legitimacy helps us see how it is that they engender two very distinct research agendas. That of political moralism will be characterised by discussions regarding the relative priority of different moral values in determining the principles that regulate our shared political associations, their content and the institutional and practical demands that they generate. This is an agenda that clearly has characterised much recent Anglo-American political theory. The realist agenda will necessarily be more interested in questions such as the conditions under which a problem of order emerges (especially ones for which politics is the unique and necessary solution),<sup>32</sup> the nature of specifically political rule and the claim to the right to rule, developing accounts of legitimacy, the role of power and coercion in political life, and the differences between politics, tyranny and domination. While this agenda in itself need not undermine the sort of normative political theorising that has recently dominated the field of political theory, it does give us reason to both question the hold that such theorising has had over the discipline for so long and, more importantly, be wary of the crudest forms of political moralism in which the entirety of politics and the questions we can ask of it is taken up by our answers to what justice, freedom, equality, reciprocity or any other moral value demands.

## **Realism and *Realpolitik***

There is undoubtedly a strand of the realist tradition that views politics as consisting primarily of power relations and the amoral pursuit of brute material self-interest, leaving little (if any) room for normative considerations.<sup>33</sup> This *Realpolitik* is a form of political realism but it does not exhaust the entire realist tradition. Indeed, that realism is often equated in international relations with an amoral politics which gives primacy to military power and national interest has done much to deplete the richness of the realist tradition and entrench a caricature that does great disservice to the nuances and subtleties of the classic IR realist scholars such as Hans J. Morgenthau, E. H. Carr, Reinhold Niebuhr and John H. Herz.<sup>34</sup> Each of these writers believed that

morality plays an important and in-eliminable role in political life. Carr was adamant that one could not be a “consistent and thorough-going realist” in the sense of seeking to remove all utopian or idealist aspirations from political thought, “for realism, though logically overwhelming, does not provide us with the springs of action which are necessary even to the pursuit of thought.”<sup>35</sup> We cannot properly understand politics without attending to morality also. Likewise, though Morgenthau did write that “the concept of interest defined in terms of power” provides the “main signpost” for helping us navigate through international politics, he did not believe that power has a “meaning that is fixed once and for all.” Rather, “the kind of interest determining political action in a particular period of history depends upon the political and cultural context within which foreign policy is formulated. The goals that might be pursued by nations in their foreign policy can run the whole gamut of objectives any nation has ever pursued or might possibly pursue.”<sup>36</sup> We must be sure, therefore, not to mistake the aims and objectives of contemporary realism with those of its *Realpolitik* relation.

One ramification of this difference in the relationship between morality and politics that is of interest to us here relates to how realism and *Realpolitik* conceptualise legitimacy. Carr provided a good summary of the *Realpolitik* position on legitimacy when he wrote:

What was, is right. History cannot be judged except by historical standards. . . . If Wat Tyler’s rebellion had succeeded, he would be an English national hero. If the American War of Independence had ended in disaster, the Founding Fathers of the United States would be briefly recorded in history as a gang of turbulent and unscrupulous fanatics. *Nothing succeeds like success.* “World history,” in the famous phrase which Hegel borrowed from Schiller, “is the world court.” The popular paraphrase “Might is Right” is misleading only if we attach too restricted a meaning to the word “Might.” History creates rights, and therefore right.<sup>37</sup>

Carr was clear that such a position was untenable because it involved acceptance of the whole historical process and precluded moral judgements upon it, a test of legitimacy and right that will “if consistently held, empty thought of purpose, and thereby sterilise and ultimately destroy it.”<sup>38</sup> Might is not right; the standard for legitimacy is not success. And, as we saw in the previous section, this distinction between successful domination and politics remains central to contemporary realism, and it is in order to maintain this distinctiveness that realists insist on there being normative criteria for political legitimacy.

So it is because realism accepts that might cannot equal right that responses to the legitimisation demand must make appeals to normative, including

specifically moral, values, principles and ideals. However, though realism does not seek to disavow itself of moral justifications for political power, part of what it objects to in the way that political moralism operates is the thought that the normative standards of legitimacy are universal and hence can be appropriately applied when making judgements about societies in the past or elsewhere in the world today. "Political moralism," Williams wrote, "particularly in its Kantian forms, has a universalistic tendency which encourages it to inform past societies about their failings."<sup>39</sup> This overlooks the extent to which the question of legitimating political power is deeply historically and socially contextualised. As Geuss puts it, "The legitimacy mechanisms available in a given society change from one historical period to another, as do the total set of beliefs held by agents, the mechanisms for changing beliefs, or generating new ones (newspapers, universities, etc.), and the forms of widely distributed, socially rooted, moral conceptions. These are all important parts of what makes a given society the society it is."<sup>40</sup> Likewise, Williams was insistent that any successful response to the BLD for us, here and now, must be one that *makes sense* to us as a form of legitimate authority with reference to *our* political, moral, and social concepts.<sup>41</sup> This means that it is fundamentally unclear why one would want to cast judgements on the illegitimacy of societies that came before us according to our own standards (like Kant at the court of King Arthur) but also suggests that political moralism misses the extent to which the normativity of legitimacy, how it should help guide us and how we behave, depends upon it being something that *we* can recognise as authoritative.<sup>42</sup>

Williams's notion that legitimacy requires the regime makes sense as a form of authoritative political order is consonant with the realist rejection of consent as a condition of legitimacy. While a response to the BLD must be offered to each person over whom the rulers claim the right to rule, it is not the case that all persons need to accept that response in order for their rule to be legitimated.<sup>43</sup> The free consent of the ruled is not, in other words, a condition of political legitimacy. Here realism is clearly at odds with the liberal view of legitimacy.<sup>44</sup> It differs significantly also from Max Weber's (avowedly realist) theory of legitimacy insofar as it insists that any given association is not legitimate because people believe that it is legitimate "but because it can be *justified in terms of* their beliefs."<sup>45</sup> What matters is that the political order makes sense as a form of legitimate authority in relation to the beliefs (moral, political, social, economic, etc.) of those who are subject to it, that it conforms to people's values and standards, and that it meets the normative expectations that we have of it. This means that legitimacy does not require the aggregating of opinions nor does it depend on the general popularity of

the regime's political institutions or principles. As John Horton notes, legitimacy "is about the acknowledgment of the state as having authority—recognising the right of the state to exercise state power by making laws, pursuing policies and enforcing them on its citizens that are the routine business of the state—in terms that are taken to be salient within the context in which such authority is exercised and affirmed."<sup>46</sup> So rather than assuming that the agreement of the citizenry legitimates the political order, persons' acceptance of the regime is deemed to be a product of the fact that its main institutions and fundamental constitutional principles, as well as general behaviour, is consonant with or justifiable in terms of the people's beliefs and broader cultural and conceptual context in which they function. Judgements about the legitimacy of a political order, or the use of political power, are assessments of the degree of congruence, or lack of it, between that order and the beliefs, values and normative expectations that its subjects have of political authority.<sup>47</sup>

This account of realist legitimacy has several strengths or advantages that are worth briefly mentioning. First of all, it does not require us to demonstrate that persons have consented, either actually or hypothetically, to the political order, a philosophical and practical difficulty that has dogged much liberal political thought. All that is necessary is that the regime can be presented in a manner consistent with citizens' beliefs, values, principles and norms. This does not mean that consent plays no role in the theory of legitimacy. But it does mean that citizens' consent cannot be the reason why the state is deemed to be legitimate. They might recognise or acknowledge that it is so, but this does not ground or justify political legitimacy. The more legitimate the state is, the more likely it will be that people do acknowledge or recognise it as legitimate. But it is not the recognition itself that establishes the legitimacy.<sup>48</sup> Secondly, this realist account allows us to make judgements about degrees of legitimacy rather than insisting that legitimations be an all-or-nothing assessment. Regimes will be more or less legitimate depending on how congruent they are with the beliefs of those over whom they rule. Yet because beliefs, values and norms differ between societies, realism has to accommodate the fact that the criteria for legitimacy will differ between societies also. The distinction between politics and illegitimate power remains in place as a universal but the standards for distinguishing between them is relative to the particular society and regime in question. Hence realism is appropriately sensitive to different historical and social contexts and avoids seeking to provide specific and determinate universal criteria for political legitimacy. And because a society's beliefs and values change over time also, as do our normative expectations of what a legitimate political authority must accomplish, this account is better placed to allow us to track how cultural or ideational changes within a political community can affect judgements about

legitimacy. Legitimizing power is a continuous process, and one that needs to acknowledge the extent to which regimes can become both less and more legitimate insofar as they fail or succeed to keep up with political, social, cultural and economic changes.<sup>49</sup>

In appealing to the values and beliefs of any given context, realism is able to sustain a normative account of legitimacy and in doing so differentiate itself from the crude *Realpolitik* position. What I now want to suggest is that in seeking to distinguish itself from *Realpolitik* in this manner, realism comes up against some inevitable limitations which have yet to be fully appreciated: In accounts such as the one offered here, which rely upon justifying coercive power in relation to the beliefs, principles, values, etc. of the social context in question, no form of political order is ever going to be perfectly legitimated. This inevitable imperfection ensures that even sufficient responses to the demand for legitimacy will not be seen as satisfactory from the perspective of all those subject to the political order, and, in these instances, politics does require the illegitimate, or at the very least imperfectly legitimated, use of coercive power. If this is right then, at least in this important sense, realism does retain some affinity to *Realpolitik*. Let me set out the underlying reason for the inescapable limitations of legitimation stories first of all, before going on to say a little more about its important ramifications for the relationship between coercion and legitimacy in realist thought.

Realism assumes that politics takes place in conditions of radical disagreement in which all moral and political values, beliefs and principles are deeply contested. It is in this context that the legitimation of coercive power is undertaken. All political communities will be characterised by a plurality of different and conflicting beliefs and the task of providing an adequate response to the demand for legitimacy must be appropriately sensitive to this fact. Indeed, it seems clear that just as people disagree about matters of justice, freedom, equality, rights, and so on, they disagree about legitimacy also. Some reject that the prevailing political order is legitimate at all, and hence that it has no right to rule; others will believe that it is imperfectly legitimated and that there are more legitimate political alternatives available, while several will affirm its overall legitimacy.<sup>50</sup> People differ in their judgements about the legitimacy of the political association of which they are a part. These disagreements have their origins in a variety of sources. On the one hand, Geuss reminds us that “people often have no determinate beliefs at all about a variety of subjects; they often don’t know what they want or why they did something; even when they know or claim to know what they want, they can often give no coherent account of why exactly they want what they claim to want. . . . This is not simply an epistemic failing, and also not something that one could in principle remedy, but a pervasive ‘inherent’ feature in

human life.”<sup>51</sup> And the beliefs that inform our judgements about legitimacy “are often as confused, potentially contradictory, incomplete, and pliable as anything else.”<sup>52</sup> But we need not be as pessimistic (or maybe realistic) as Geuss in order to account for our disagreements about legitimacy. Some of these disagreements will stem from differing assessments as to how well the political order, its institutions and fundamental principles are justified with reference to values that some persons manage to endorse in common. In fact our disagreements often take exactly this form (e.g., we both believe that the protection of human rights is necessary for political legitimacy though disagree in our assessment of how well our state is doing in that regard), and when they do it will lead us to hold differing views as to the legitimacy of the status quo.

However, disagreements also arise because all societies will contain a plurality of competing political traditions, as well as a series of rival accounts of the values and goods necessary for political legitimacy. Although any context will, at any one point, only contain a finite amount of beliefs, it is not possible (even in the case of one’s own society) to derive from this a single comprehensive judgement as to how well the political order corresponds to or is justifiable in terms of those beliefs. This is not simply because people hold different and conflicting views but also because there are a series of questions that arise in relation to those beliefs which persons will interpret and answer differently: Which beliefs or values are salient when it comes to political legitimacy (or, which beliefs and values must the political order be justifiable in terms of)? When there is a plurality of pertinent beliefs, which should take priority and how do we assess their relative importance? How should we interpret these complex moral and political concepts, values and goods? That people will answer these questions in a variety of ways will ensure that they are also led to different judgements regarding the legitimacy of the political order, of its right to rule. No amount of understanding of “the concrete context of the culture, political institutions and intellectual and moral traditions within which such reasoning [about legitimacy] occurs” will ever allow us to reach a final judgement that is fully representative of that society’s complex myriad of beliefs and values.<sup>53</sup>

The way that we should respond to this is probably by insisting that it is sufficient for the purposes of legitimacy if the political order makes *some* sense or that it can be represented as congruent with a *plausible* interpretation of the key beliefs, values and principles within that society. People will disagree as to which account of legitimacy makes most or best sense, or which account is the most plausible interpretation of our most fundamental beliefs, but that is the very stuff of political debate and conflict.<sup>54</sup> Yet this does mean that any regime, even one that is ostensibly legitimate, will not be even or

uniformed in its legitimation across all persons over whom it rules. There will always be some within a political society who reject that it is legitimate or judge it to be legitimated only imperfectly. It may well be the case, therefore, that the best that even successful and sufficient responses to the demand for legitimacy can hope for is a somewhat limited legitimation. If this is right, then it means that political rule does demand or necessitate the use of coercive power that is (at best) insufficiently legitimated. At least in part every political order will be partially imposed by coercive force because it cannot be fully or sufficiently legitimated to all those who are subject to it. While the fact that the use of imperfectly legitimated political power takes place in a context in which the state is widely recognised to have the right to wield coercive force (in legitimate states, at least), there will always be some within the state's borders who obey its instructions in response to that coercion (or the threat of it) rather than out of recognition of its legitimacy.

At this point, realism has a choice. Either it accepts that even legitimate regimes rule illegitimately, and hence non-politically, over at least some of its citizens or it insists that such insufficiently legitimated coercion is still a form of politics because it is necessary for creating and sustaining order. Mark Philp defends this second option, for instance, when he writes, "It is not an intrinsically good thing that some are coerced in the name of order—but it may well be better than the alternatives. Such a solution is still 'political rule' since the trade-off between coercion and legitimacy is claimed to be, on at least some dimension, optimal for securing order."<sup>55</sup> I do not want to advocate either of these here but rather simply establish the various paths that a more developed account of realist legitimacy must take. Importantly, however, the fact that this is the choice which faces realism throws into severe question the cogency of the analytical distinction in realist thought between politics (legitimate rule) and non-politics (illegitimate rule through coercive force). Whichever of these paths realism takes, both blur this distinction by insisting that political rule requires or necessitates successful domination. While might is not in toto right, a state is clearly illegitimate if all persons obey due to coercion or fear of coercion, realism may need to acknowledge that might in the sense of illegitimated coercion is a necessary ingredient of right. This need not be seen as undermining realist thought, however. Rather, recognising that the distinction between might and right is neither perfect nor rigid might actually allow realist theory to better track the realities of political life. After all, every political regime is a mixture, to various degrees, of legitimated and imperfectly legitimated political relationships. And politics often includes activities such as terrorism or resistance that it is difficult to classify as political in the sense of employing legitimated coercion. So it may be that the distinction between politics and successful domination is one that realism needs to alter or abandon so as to itself be more realistic.



Furthermore, realism must also recognise that legitimacy does not stand above the fray of political contestation but is itself deeply immersed in it. Legitimations, as Geuss puts it, “do not have a coherence and independence of the wider political and social world. . . . They are a part of real history, like most of the rest of life.”<sup>56</sup> As such, the process of legitimation, which is a process in which legitimacy can be both affirmed and denied, is part of the very struggle for power and influence that is politics. Some people (the rulers) will be trying to maintain their power through demonstrating and reinforcing their legitimacy, while others seek to undermine that power, weaken it, control it, direct it towards different ends, or maybe even wrest it away from the rulers altogether by seeking to question the legitimacy of their rule. This is why the very endeavour of justifying power is often pragmatic and on occasions even violent. But importantly the process of legitimation is never going to be able to fully escape the very power relations that stand in need of justification and will rather always remain deeply immersed in them. This means that again there has to be *some* truth to the *Realpolitik* notion that “Might is Right.” The success of legitimation processes will depend, at least in some part, upon mechanisms of control, coercion and influence. While the norms, beliefs and principles within any given society will always act as a constraint, and sometimes a great restraint, on what actions can be deemed legitimate such that it can never always be true that “nothing succeeds like success,” there is no way in which legitimacy can float completely free from the power relations in which it is engaged (and to think that it can is to repeat the moralist mistake of thinking that our assessments of political legitimacy can take place wholly independently of politics itself). Judgements regarding legitimacy do not require wholesale acceptance of the outcomes of history, but nor are they moral verdicts made completely independently of the result of previous or contemporary struggles and contests.

Striking this further balance between *Realpolitik* and moralism speaks to the fact that realism undoubtedly needs to develop a critical edge which equips us with the theoretical resources to judge when acceptance of the status quo is created through the use of the very coercive power that stands in need of justification. This is, of course, the purpose of Williams’s Critical Theory Principle.<sup>57</sup> Though this has been the subject of much criticism, Williams saw that realism requires such a principle if it is to avoid collapsing into *Realpolitik*.<sup>58</sup> But again the balance is always going to be an imperfect one, for political unity is itself an “artefact” of politics and coercive force.<sup>59</sup> In conditions of radical disagreement, coercion plays a crucial transformative role in developing the sort of acceptance (or acquiescence) of the state and its institutions that politics (and legitimacy) requires.<sup>60</sup> And the coercive mechanisms now available to states to influence individuals’ judgements and

behaviour are simultaneously more subtle yet more intrusive. It cannot be the case, as Williams could be read to be suggesting, that any use of coercive power in motivating individuals' acceptance of a regime instantly disqualifies it as illegitimate. This is too rudimentary. But equally some critical distance from those power relations is clearly required so that the ability to achieve obedience through coercion does not equate with the right to employ that coercion. The development of a critical realist theory that can provide this distance from which judgements about legitimacy can be made while remaining sensitive to the power relations of any particular context is therefore a crucial, and so far largely absent, component of a complete theory of political realism

## Conclusion

It has been noted on several occasions that the resurgence of interest in political realism is better characterised as a unified movement of resistance against the excessive moralism of Rawlsian liberalism than a more positive programme with agreed principles, aims or methods.<sup>61</sup> There is some truth to this, though I think the non-programmatic character of realism also reflects the fact that there is less space in realist thought for the sort of grand systematic normative theorising about justice, about freedom, about rights, and so on, than many political theorists would like. Compared to other political theories such as liberalism, for example, realism has a much more restricted research agenda. And it is true that no amount of criticism by realists of liberalism is, on its own, going to provide the theoretical grounds for developing an alternative more realistic theory of politics, regardless of how compelling that critique is. But this said, realism does now have an identifiable and distinct agenda around which some broad agreement on principles, aims and methods is beginning to convalesce. The need to present a fuller account of legitimacy, the desire to give greater autonomy or priority to politics, and the distinction between politics and successful domination, all discussed here, are such areas of common endeavour, though they sit alongside and compete with many other important aspects of realist thought that I have not touched upon here such as whether there is a form of morality or virtue specific to politics<sup>62</sup>; political judgement and political leadership<sup>63</sup>; the role of the emotions or passions in political life<sup>64</sup>; the place and limits of compromise in politics<sup>65</sup>; the analysis of political institutions<sup>66</sup>; a broader account of citizens' allegiance to the state, one which goes beyond the grounds of the state's legitimacy to include other mechanisms for garnering and maintaining support<sup>67</sup>; the democratic mechanisms for "taming" disagreement and conflict<sup>68</sup>; and the nature of specifically political thinking.<sup>69</sup> There are, of course, noticeable disagreements amongst realists on all these points but such internal

variation typifies all intellectual traditions, and especially traditions as old and complex as realism. Indeed I think we are now at the point at which a paper on realism need not start with the familiar caveats about it being an essentially critical movement consisting of a “ragtag band”<sup>70</sup> of thinkers from a variety of different theoretical and philosophical perspectives, as if the same were not true for a paper on liberalism or Marxism for instance, but can instead acknowledge that it is a contribution to a recognised set of theoretical political questions in its own right.

These questions might not always be unique (after all, what legitimates the use of power is one of the oldest questions of political thought), but contemporary realism’s attempt to provide answers to these questions which occupy the ground between *Realpolitik* and moralism, or the often dirty political world of power and coercion on the one hand and of high principle and noble goals on the other, is. There necessarily will be aspects of realism that will look too moralistic and idealistic to an advocate of *Realpolitik* and too much like a concession to the unprincipled brutality of power to the moralist. But realism should take comfort in the fact that in being the target of scorn from both sides, it is occupying exactly the same battle ground on which the reality of politics, the day-to-day stuff of political life, takes place.

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### **Notes**

1. Jeremy Waldron, *Law and Disagreement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 102. For this realist critique of the liberal principle of legitimacy see also,

- Andrew Mason, "Rawlsian Theory and the Circumstances of Politics," *Political Theory* 38, no. 5 (2010): 658–83; Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 2005); Matt Sleat, "Liberal Realism: A Liberal Response to the Realist Critique," *The Review of Politics* 73, no. 3 (2011): 469–96; Marc Stears, "Liberalism and the Politics of Compulsion," *British Journal of Political Science* 37 (2007): 533–53; Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).
2. Realist accounts of legitimacy other than that developed in this essay include democratic theories (see Mason, "Rawlsian Theory and the Circumstances of Politics"; Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* [London: Routledge, 2005]; Waldron, *Law and Disagreement*), accounts grounded in authorisation and collective agency (see Glen Newey, "Two Dogmas of Liberalism," *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, no. 4 (2010), 449–65), and theories of modus vivendi (see, for instance, John Horton, "Realism, liberal moralism and a political theory of modus vivendi," *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, no. 4 [2010]: 431–48; David McCabe, *Modus Vivendi Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Enzo Rossi, "Modus Vivendi, Consensus, and (Realist) Liberal Legitimacy," *Public Reason* 2, no. 2 [2010]: 21–39).
  3. Mark Philp stresses the importance of developing a thorough account of legitimacy in a recent critical overview of contemporary realism: "What is clear is that we need a more complex and sophisticated account of legitimacy for realism, one that thinks hard about the different forms it takes, the different ways in which it can be constructed, and the different impact it has on those brought to acknowledge it" ("Realism without Illusions," *Political Theory* 40, no. 5 (2012), 629–49, 634).
  4. Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008); Williams, *In the Beginning was the Deed*.
  5. Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*, 9.
  6. Charles Larmore, "What Is Political Philosophy?," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 10, no. 3 (2013): 276–306, 289.
  7. See also, Richard Bellamy, "Dirty Hands and Clean Gloves: Liberal Ideals and Real Politics," *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, no. 4 (2010), 412–30; Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993); John Horton, "Political Legitimacy, Justice and Consent," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 15, no. 2 (2012), 129–48; Mouffe, *On the Political*; Stears, "Liberalism and the Politics of Compulsion"; Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, ed. D. Owen and T. B. Strong (Cambridge: Hackett, 2004).
  8. Larmore, "What Is Political Philosophy?," 290.
  9. *Ibid.*, 290.
  10. In the paragraph that follows, I summarise Larmore's reading of Williams (*ibid.*, 290–91).
  11. Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed*, 3.
  12. *Ibid.*, 4.

13. Larmore, "What Is Political Philosophy?," 291.
14. Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed*, 5.
15. Larmore, "What Is Political Philosophy?," 291.
16. *Ibid.*, 292.
17. *Ibid.*, 292.
18. Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed*, 8.
19. *Ibid.*, 11, emphasis added.
20. *Ibid.*, 6.
21. *Ibid.*, 5, 135.
22. Mark Philp makes a similar claim when he writes that the concept of legitimacy "has force where those involved are engaged in the set of practices that we recognise as politics and which claim, in some way or another, a right to rule others. This makes their action intelligible, both to themselves and to others, and offers the prospect of internal criteria, simply in virtue of their attempt to order the relations of others and to claim some remit or right to do so. Those who are merely violent can make no such claim; whereas those who use politics implicitly claim, in a very general way, a degree of legitimacy" (Mark Philp, "What Is to Be Done? Political Theory and Political Realism," *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, no. 4 [2010]: 466–84, 471, emphasis added). See also Mark Philp, *Political Conduct* (London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 56: "Authority becomes expressly political in character when it invokes a more or less explicit claim that the right to rule rests on some specific or principled ground." On the distinction between politics and domination, see also Richard Flathman, "In and out of the Ethical: The Realist Liberalism of Bernard Williams," *Contemporary Political Theory* 9 (2010): 77–98, 86; Horton, "Political Legitimacy, Justice and Consent," 131; Enzo Rossi, "Reality and Imagination in Political Theory and Practice: On Raymond Geuss' Realism," *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, no. 4 (2010): 504–12, 508–10.
23. Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed*, 5. The fact that the legitimation demand must be met for any coercive relationship to be deemed an instance of politics per se rather than merely force or domination, and that this is true for all forms of politics rather than just liberal political arrangements, means that the centrality of legitimacy to Williams's theory does not stem, as Michael Freeden has suggested, simply from his wish to justify specifically liberal politics on more realistic grounds ("Interpretive Realism and Descriptive Realism," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 17, no. 1 [2012]: 1–11, 6). Though there still might be good reason to think that the way in which Williams conceives legitimacy is still beholden to certain liberal commitments (see Matt Sleat, "Bernard Williams and the Possibility of a Realist Political Theory," *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, no. 4 (2010): 485–503).
24. Williams, *In the Beginning was the Deed*, 8–9.
25. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 137.
26. Charles Larmore, "The Moral Basis of Political Liberalism," *The Journal of Philosophy* 96, no. 12 (1999): 599–625, 607.

27. It is therefore neither a necessary condition for a demand for legitimation to arise in political moralism that persons over whom the power is being employed demand one, nor is it a sufficient condition of a legitimation demand being met that all such persons accept the justification offered (for that justification might appeal to the wrong principles of legitimacy). Nor can it be a sufficient condition for a demand for legitimation to arise that persons faced with coercive power request that such coercion be justified, for this would undercut the possibility of assessing the legitimacy of regimes in which acceptance of a particular regime is being produced by the very power that stands in need of justification.
28. Yet it is still the task of *political* theory, on this moralist view, to explicate these pre-political moral conditions.
29. See, e.g., Sleat, "Liberal Realism: A Liberal Response to the Realist Critique"; Stears, "Liberalism and the Politics of Compulsion"; and Waldron, *Law and Disagreement*.
30. Moralists believe that power is not self-justifying too of course. But this is seen not as a fact that arises from within the political sphere but a consequence of there being a normative difference between morally permissible (legitimate) and morally impermissible (illegitimate) forms of rule.
31. Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed*, 3, emphasis added.
32. See Philp, "Realism without Illusions," 632.
33. Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War* is often cited as the intellectual forbearer of this form of realism, though this is a matter of much scholarly debate. More recently, the work of "neo-realists" in international relations, Kenneth Waltz most notably, has been explicitly characterised as free from normative concerns. See, e.g., Kenneth Waltz, "Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory," *Journal of International Affairs* 44, no. 1 (1990): 21–38.
34. Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations—The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 4th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967); E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); John H. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); Reinold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (London: Continuum, 2005).
35. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 84.
36. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, 5, 8–9.
37. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 64–65, emphasis added.
38. *Ibid.*, 86.
39. Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed*, 10.
40. Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*, 35.
41. Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed*, 11.
42. *Ibid.*, 10–11.
43. *Ibid.*, 135–36. In an earlier discussion of Williams (Sleat, "Bernard Williams and the Possibility of a Realist Political Theory"), I argued that any sufficient response to the BLD must be accepted by *all* those subject to the power in need of legitimation, and hence overlooked the important distinction in his work between those the state claims the right to rule (subjects) and those it de facto

- rules through coercion but without any claim to right (enemies). I wish to thank Ed Hall in particular for helping me be clearer on this point. But this does give rise to a further set of questions which realist thought needs to take seriously: What is at stake in whether a particular coercive relationship is to be thought of as political or not? Why is it pertinent whether we call this relation “political” (especially in contexts where rulers might be able to rule through coercion alone)? Does realism have a normative account of politics?
44. For another excellent and canonical statement of the liberal view of legitimacy, see Jeremy Waldron, “Theoretical Foundations of liberalism,” *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 37 (1987): 127–50.
  45. David Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 1991), 11.
  46. Horton, “Political Legitimacy, Justice and Consent,” 141.
  47. Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 11.
  48. Here I follow Horton, “Political Legitimacy, Justice and Consent,” 141–42.
  49. One further advantage of this approach to legitimacy is that it has the potential to bridge the often perceived dichotomy between sociological and normative approaches to understanding legitimacy. I do not explore this further in this paper, but for interesting and different accounts which I take to be potentially consistent with the argument developed here see Chris Thornhill, “Political Legitimacy: A Theoretical Approach between Facts and Norms,” *Constellations* 18, no. 2 (2011): 135–69; and Thomas Fossen, “Taking Stances, Contesting Commitments: Political Legitimacy and the Pragmatic Turn,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 21, no. 4 (2013): 426–450. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to these articles.
  50. There is, of course, another group of persons likely to be very highly represented in most political societies: those who acquiesce with the prevailing order and have few, if any, views about its legitimacy.
  51. Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*, 2–3.
  52. *Ibid.*, 36.
  53. Horton, “Political Legitimacy, Justice and Consent,” 143.
  54. Once universal consent has been abandoned as a necessary criterion of legitimacy, the question of who needs to be satisfied that the demand for legitimation has been met becomes highly dependent on the circumstances. There is probably little more that can be said other than, with Williams, that it must include a substantial number of the people and that, being a political question, whichever other groups or powers are judged necessary in that context (*In the Beginning Was the Deed*, 136).
  55. Philp, “Realism without Illusions,” 637–38.
  56. Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*, 36.
  57. Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed*, 6.
  58. Michael Freeden, “Interpretative Realism and Prescriptive Realism,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 17, no. 1 (2012): 1–11; Newey, “Two Dogmas of Liberalism”; Sleat, “Bernard Williams and the Possibility of a Realist Political Theory.”
  59. Stears, “Liberalism and the Politics of Compulsion,” 542.

60. For the transformative role of even liberal constitutions, see Stephen Macedo, "Transformative Constitutionalism and the Case of Religion: Defending the Moderate Hegemony of Liberalism," *Political Theory* 26, no. 1 (1998): 56–80.
61. See Philp, "Realism without Illusions," 631.
62. See Bellamy, "Dirty Hands and Clean Gloves; Philp, *Political Conduct*; Philp, "What Is to Be Done?"
63. See Richard Bourke and Raymond Geuss (eds.), *Political Judgement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); John Dunn, *The Cunning of Unreason* (London: HarperCollins, 2000); Andy Sabl, *Ruling Passions—Political Offices and Democratic Ethics* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002).
64. See Galston, "Realism in Political Theory."
65. See Richard Bellamy, *Liberalism and Pluralism—Towards a Politics of Compromise* (London: Routledge, 1999); John Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism* (New York: New Press, 2000); Avishai Margalit, *On Compromise and Rotten Compromises* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010); McCabe, *Modus Vivendi Liberalism*.
66. See Jeremy Waldron, "Political Political Theory," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 21, no. 1 (2013) 1–23.
67. See Andy Sabl, *Hume's Politics* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012).
68. See Mouffe, *On the Political*; Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*; Waldron, *Law and Disagreement*.
69. See Michael Freedden, "Failures of Political Thinking," *Political Studies* 57, no. 1 (2009): 141–64; Michael Freedden, *The Political Theory of Political Thinking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
70. Galston, "Realism in Political Theory" 385–86.

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